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ROMANCE

OF

THE PYRENEES.

VOL. II.

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OF

THE PYRENEES.

IN

FOUR VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF SANTO SEBASTIANO, A NOVEL.

THIRD EDITION.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR G. ROBINSON,

PATERNOSTER-ROW;

By T. Davison, White-Friars.

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CHAP. I.

VICTORIA was awakened at an early hour by the rays of the sun, which stole through the latticed windows and played upon her face, the curtains of her bed remaining unclosed, to enable her to see danger the moment it appeared. On first opening her eyes her recollection was not quite awake, and she stared around her with that momentary vacuity of mind often experienced after a heavy slumber. The objects that struck her view were not familiar to her: this brought on the mental inquiry of "Where am I?"

which like an electric shock sprung through her heart, rousing at once the horrid recollection of her wretched situation: then starting upon her elbow to see if her companions were safe, as was her morning custom, horror at once assailed every faculty of her mind, and, shrieking wildly, she sprung from her bed almost frantic with dismay. Her screams awakened Hero, who, in violent perturbation, demanded the cause of her alarm.

"Oh! tell me," cried Victoria, in the wild half-shrieking tones of terror, "am I awake? Am I not in a hideous dream? Where is signora Bernini? Where, where is her bed?"

Hero looked, and saw that both were gone, and no vestige of either remaining; and Victoria, now convinced by Hero's frantic astonishment and horror that it was no delusion, flew to the spot where the bed had stood, and, vehemently stamping with her feet to learn if the floor was firm, found it immoveable, and so curiously inlaid, that a separation in any part of it seemed impossible. Next she eagerly examined the wainscot, then the ceiling: but no clue to the disappearance of Octavia could she discover, the door remaining fast

bolted on the inside, as they had left it when they fell asleep.

Horror chilled Victoria's very soul; and transfixed by despair she leaned against one of the posts of her own bed, until the dreadful groans of Hero, who lay in strong convulsions on the floor, roused her senses into action. Her agony of mind was now almost beyond conception:—one, and infinitely the most valuable of her companions, conveyed away by some inexplicable means, no doubt for some infernal purpose; the other dying at her feet, without her having power to afford her the least assistance. Their united shrieks had not brought any one to their aid. Hero became visibly worse; and compassion suggested an idea to Victoria, which no power but compassion could have urged her to adopt.

Although now convinced that horror reigned through every part of this mysterious place, she determined, as the last effort to save poor Hero's life, to go immediately to the library; which being contiguous to the apartments of Sebastian, she hoped to make him hear her,

and bring him to Hero with medicines proper for her relief.

Relying upon the early hour (it not yet being five o'clock) for passing unobserved,—compassion lending her firmness, and anxiety to succeed, caution,—she softly, yet swiftly, glided unmolested to the door where the statue of Neptune stood; when, as she was about to turn the angle into the gallery which fronted it, she beheld a man of ferocious aspect advancing along the gallery, carrying in one hand a lantern, in the other a poniard.

Never had Victoria felt such a wish to retain her self-possession: she considered the life of poor Hero was at stake: her heart devoutly prayed to Heaven for firmness, and she found herself rational and collected. To retreat would be absurd and dangerous, as the length of the passage to her apartment could not favour it; she therefore slid between the pillars of the door, and concealed herself behind the pedestal on which the statue rested. But how nearly had all her courage been subdued, when the ruffian entered between the pillars close to her, and, not observing her,

went into the apartment, leaving the door partly open! when our heroine instinctively followed him with her eyes, and saw him proceed almost to the end of a gloomy large room, where stood a female figure of gigantic stature and fantastic appearance, before whom the man suddenly stopped; and the figure advancing with extended arms, the man instantly vanished in her embrace. Terror and amazement seemed now to suspend all Victoria's thoughts of proceeding, until a deep and lengthened groan of Hero's reached her ear, and restored at once her faculties. Again imploring the protection of Heaven, she bounded forward, and without any further interruption, reached the library door, which, to her utter dismay, she found fastened beyond her power to open. This was her last resource: it failed her; and shocked and subdued, she uttered a piteous sigh, fainted and fell.

On recovering from her swoon, Victoria found herself in the library, supported by Sebastian, while Hippolyto was anxiously employed using every means for her recovery. Assured by their presence and protection, her

almost exhausted spirits rallied, and briefly she answered the anxious inquiries of Sebastian into the cause of her being found in such a situation at that early hour, and entreated his assistance for poor Hero, whom she believed expiring.

Sebastian, although shocked and astonished at the fate of Octavia, and at all the mystery that enveloped it, and pitying from his soul the horrors of Victoria's hapless situation, was not slow in contriving for Hero's relief, and gave his directions to Hippolyto accordingly.

Hippolyto, in obedience to Sebastian, immediately disappeared, and soon returned with a genteel-looking man, of about six-and-thirty, with a pleasing intelligent countenance, whom Victoria had never before seen, and who, as well as Hippolyto, had some bottles of medicine in his hands. They all now hastened softly and unmolested to the chamber, where Hero lay in strong convulsions, but which the skill of Pedro put as speedy a termination to as could possibly be expected; and as soon as the poor affrighted creature was perfectly restored to her

senses, Pedro begged leave to depart, lest it should be known that he had afforded assistance to any of the captives without orders from the higher powers; and Sebastian also thought it prudent for himself and Hippolyto to retire, lest the vile emissaries of the diabolical Garcias should discover Victoria's having had courage to summon assistance; when he would certainly find means to prevent her receiving any in future. Hippolyto was grieved at leaving her in such a forlorn situation, but saw the necessity of it; and Victoria, believing in the justice of her venerable friend's apprehensions, acquiesced in the prudence of their departure.

Sebastian, the surgeon, and the negro, had not been very long gone, when Victoria, sitting by Hero's bed-side, deep sunk in mournful meditation upon her own most hapless situation and the mysterious disappearance of Octavia, turned her eyes with sad regretting glances to the spot so lately occupied by her poor friend; when her attention was arrested by something in an oval form glittering upon the floor, just where Octavia's bed had stood. It was probably

some trinket belonging to her, and this idea made Victoria wish to possess it. Her nerves shook to the quick; she trembled at every movement, and almost feared to approach the spot where the trinket lay. At length, however, she summoned sufficient courage to make the effort, and found it to be the miniature portrait of a man, young and transcendently handsome, set round with brilliants of such value as announced at once its never having been the property of signora Bernini. To whom then did it belong? It could not have been drawn for Don Manuel, even at an early period of his life; for although Don Manuel was as strictly beautiful, the features were unlike his; nor could his countenance ever have borne expression of such a heavenly cast as beamed in that portrait.

With this highly admired portrait in her hand, Victoria softly returned to her seat by Hero, who had, from fatigue, fallen into a gentle slumber; and gazing upon the picture, she, for a time, lost the recollection of her misery in wild conjectures of who the original could be. Sometimes a thought occurred of its being drawn for Theodore,

Teresa's child. But how could it have been so finely drawn and set in the castle? and for whom? Then she conceived it a resemblance of the wretched person who had terminated his sublunary miseries in that very chamber so short a period before. At this idea she shuddered with horror, and hastily dismissed the probability of it: for although there was a degree of sadness mixed with sweetness in the expression of the picture, that bespoke the original not free from care, in the countenance she also thought she visibly saw pourtrayed, a sublimity of soul that proclaimed a believer, not an infidel. Wearied with vague conjectures, she at length determined to show the portrait to Sebastian, to learn, if possible, from him whose resemblance it was, or at any rate advise with him upon the means of restoring such valuable property to the right owner. Soon after this determination Teresa's cough announced her approach: and when she beheld the void where the poor signora's bed had stood, and heard that her companions were in total ignorance of how she had been conveyed away, her horror and consternation were extreme; nor did Teresa scruple to

assign this mystery to supernatural agents, who she believed guided almost every occurrence in that terrible castle.

Hero, weak and ill as she was, resolved upon going down to breakfast, as nothing could induce her to remain alone in that chamber; and they all believed that Victoria would not be allowed to continue with her during the day, and Teresa had too much domestic business allotted to her to permit her stay.

With difficulty our heroine and Teresa dressed Hero, who was totally unable to assist herself; and with still greater difficulty conducted her to the parlour, where Sebastian and Alonzo were ready to receive them, Hippolyto attending.

Hero's pallid and disturbed looks, added to the excessive tremor of her frame, were too visible not to betray the situation of her mind; and as Alonzo had assumed the character of her inamorato, it was incumbent upon him to seem concerned at her appearance: therefore, with the softest air of tenderness and anxiety imaginable, he inquired nto the cause. Hero was too much agitated

to answer him: Sebastian and Hippolyto were to appear ignorant of what had occasioned her perturbation; Teresa had retired, and there was no one to give him information but our heroine.

Victoria's heart was tremblingly alive to every fine and delicate feeling: in it, no doubt, was much feminine weakness; but her mind was stored with a large portion of that fortitude which religion inspires. It had lain dormant until the moment misfortune awakened it, and upon every new exertion it seemed to acquire an increase of strength and energy. Her terrors and her sorrows sunk to the bottom of her heart, leaving no traces behind, except the interesting languor of melancholy placid resignation, infinitely more touching than the distracted agitation of Hero. The moment Sebastian looked upon Victoria, he was so much affected that he was obliged to retire to a window to conceal his emotion from Alonzo; while Hippolyto, whose sable complexion betrayed no change, gazed upon her, as if he felt more for her sufferings, than prudence would allow him to express.

In speaking as well as singing, Victoria's

voice was melody; and now each accent sounded such a melting pathos, whilst she related the cause of Hero's agitation, that every word penetrated to the souls of her auditors. Alonzo, for once deviating from his nature, felt compassion, and was, or affected to be, much surprised at the disappearance of Octavia; said he would have the castle searched, and promised that another apartment should be allotted to our heroine and her attendant, contiguous to those inhabited by the domestics.

When breakfast was ended, Hippolyto retired. Victoria, alarmed, looked beseechingly at Sebastian not to go; who understanding her wish, proposed adjourning to the library, to seek amusement for the morning.

Alonzo said he would be of the party, and that he would read a romance to Hero; while Sebastian and Victoria entertained themselves with more serious study.

In the library Alonzo seated himself by the credulous Hero, and soon by his artful rhetoric charmed fear out of her bosom; while Victoria and Sebastian, seated at some distance from them, at first affected to be deeply en-

gaged by books, and then imperceptibly fell into an earnest and interesting conversation.

In the course of this conversation, Sebastian desired our heroine to consider Hippolyto as a zealous and sincere friend, who had it much more in his power essentially to serve her than himself, being so much younger, and not, like him, suspected of disaffection to Don Manuel.

Victoria, perceiving the infinite pleasure Hero evidently took in Alonzo's attentions, and the very great partiality he laboured to evince for her, expressed a hope to Sebastian that this rising attachment might in time prove the means of Alonzo's being won over to their interest.

Sebastian advised her against the encouragement of such a fallacious hope. "Alonzo," said he, "is the most artful, sly, consummate villain in Don Manuel's service; and believe me, this attachment is only affected by him for the advancement of some secret purpose of his own. This young woman's intellects are weak. That he will soon pervert her little share of sense, and undermine her

principles, I have not the smallest doubt: and depend upon it, my child, she will become unfaithful to your interests, and commence a spy upon all your words and actions. Be timely suspicious of her; let nothing tempt you to treat her with that ingenuousness which marks your character; but conceal from her, as you would from Alonzo himself, every token of amity that passes between you and your few friends in this castle."

Victoria thanked Sebastian for his advice, which she promised implicitly to obey. As he must know the disposition of Alonzo, while she could not presume to form any judgment of it, she entertained no doubt of the propriety of his conjectures; and being well aware of the weakness and vanity of Hero's mind, she feared Alonzo would have but little difficulty in subverting her integrity; and sadly she sighed to think a being whom she could no longer confide in would be her chief companion.

Dinner hour at length arrived—they were summoned to the eating-room—Diego and

Hippolyto both attended: the former, looking inquisitively around, inquired "would not the other lady dine?"

"I hope she may, but not with us," replied Alonzo, forgetful of the dawn of feeling Victoria had inspired him with. "She this day feasts with sylphs and fairies, or may, perhaps, be sipping nectar with the gods;—but more of that some other opportunity. In the mean time, however, you must see another apartment prepared for these ladies contiguous to Teresa's, as Donna Victoria selects that amiable creature for her guardian seraph. Is there a chamber near yours, Diego, that will answer for the accommodation of these ladies?"

"Alas! no, signior, not a comfortable one," replied Diego.

"Comfortable!" exclaimed Victoria, in a tone that spoke more than she dared to express. "Can any chamber in the castle be *less* comfortable, than that, in which we have passed our nights since we were brought hither?"

"The apartments, donna, near those occupied by the domestics are not furnished in a

manner suitable to the accommodation of a lady of your rank, Diego thinks," replied Alonzo.

"My rank," said Victoria, in a calm but piteous voice, "is amongst the children of misfortune. I wish not for state, to mock my woes. Give me but an humble pallet, in a corner of the meanest hovel, where I may sleep securely, unassailed by apprehension, and I will indeed be thankful."

Almost immediately after dinner the sound of the same little bell, which once before summoned Sebastian from a conversation with Victoria, was heard; and, as before, Sebastian arose with precipitance and retired.

Victoria felt his departure as the signal for fear to re-assume its dominion over her mind; and apprehensively she sat, with her eyes fixed upon the library door, through which he had retreated, until she fell into a long and painful contemplation of the misery and hopelessness of her situation, and the uncertainty of poor Octavia's fate. At length a doleful cry, issuing from beneath her feet, roused her from her reverie; when, raising

her eyes, she perceived that both Hero and Alonzo were gone, but when, or where, she was totally ignorant of.

Alone for the first time in this fear-inspiring castle, she found herself so uncomfortable, that she fled into the library, considering that room a degree nearer to safety, from its vicinity to Sebastian's apartments. She well remembered the extraordinary figure she had seen there, and the recollection did not a little increase her tremor; but, whoever or whatever it was, it seemed to come to her assistance; and this idea gave her courage. She seated herself in one of the windows, in a situation to command a view of the whole apartment, over which she cast many a wistful glance. Each look being agreeably disappointed in the horrors it expected to encounter, she began to respire more freely, and her poor agitated mind to collect itself into a firm reliance upon that Being who "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb."

Near an hour she had sat in this situation, when a kind of liquid brightness caught her attention, which after a moment seemed to dart in oblique rays from behind one of the

maps at the west end of the room. Although Victoria's curiosity was powerfully awakened, she yet hesitated to approach it, until its continuing playfully to emit a diversity of colours convinced her that it was the rays of the departing sun, which by some means penetrated from behind that map: and she was induced to advance to the spot, to find out if possible, how this was effected, when, to her utter dismay, she beheld, through a large opening between the map and the wainscot, in a long gloomy kind of apartment, a human figure, close to the aperture, of a most elegant form, clad in flowing white drapery, kneeling by the side of a black coffin.

Half terrified and half ashamed at her intrusive curiosity, Victoria, without attempting to offend the elegant mourner by a second look, was retreating back to her seat, when her speed was suddenly arrested by the sight of a majestic figure slowly descending the staircase nearest to her. It was the figure of a knight completely cased in black armour. A huge black plume nodded in his casque, confined at bottom by an immense crescent, formed of brilliants of dazzling lustre. His

lance and shield were slung in his scarf; his arms were folded across his breast; and with head erect and solemn steps he moved in equal steady paces, in an undeviating line, from the staircase he had descended to the one at the other extremity of the room, up which he went with the same steady air of solemn grandeur; and in the darkness of the gallery his figure was soon lost: nor did a single sound betray his movements; for in all the time he had been visible to Victoria's view, though she saw his firm tread, no sound of a footstep had reached her ears.

The amazement and dismay of our heroine were so excessive, that for some moments she was unable to move from the spot where the knight had first struck her astonished view. Infinitely lighter than this armed man as she must be, she could not tread upon the marble pavement without a noise, which echo failed not to prolong: and what grave dignified man would take the trouble of descending a staircase, merely for the pleasure of going up another, that could only lead him to the spot from whence he had set out. These thoughts gave force to

the superstitious fears which the time, the place, her situation, all awakened in Victoria's mind; and she could only believe this knight a shadow, sent upon some important business by the unerring Disposer of all things; and devoutly she now, upon her knees, supplicated from His mercy fortitude to support her through the horrors by which she was encompassed; and should it be seen fit that she should be doomed to encounter such an awful missionary as that she had just seen, implored that her mind might be sufficiently sublimated to sustain her through such a trying moment.

From this short but devout address to the Deity, Victoria arose composed, and firm in the belief that she had no danger to apprehend from supernatural beings: but as there were beings in that castle who, in spite of her firm reliance upon Divine protection, made her shudder, she resolved to avail herself of Diego's humane indulgence; and summoned Teresa, whose cough seemed so troublesome to her, that Victoria would not ask her to walk in the grounds; nor would she invite her to stray about the piazza with her, upon

account of the unfinished statue, which she well imagined would call up afflicting recollections in the mind of the affectionate Teresa. But to prevent that well-meaning, but often misjudging, old woman from augmenting her fears unnecessarily, by talking upon the exhaustless subject of the horrors abounding in the castle, Victoria took up a volume of Spanish moral tales, which she read aloud, to the great delight of Teresa, as long as the decreasing light permitted her to see; but often, very often, did her thoughts wander from her employment. The elegant mourner and the black knight floated still in her imagination, though the aperture now was closed, and the warrior was no longer to be seen.

As night advanced, and Victoria could no longer read, she turned her eyes with anxious expectation upon Sebastian's door: but, alas! he appeared not; and Hero's long absence began to surprise and alarm her. At length she heard the sound of her voice and Alonzo's in the piazza, close to the window where she was sitting. Teresa immediately retreated; and Victoria drew the harp to her and played: nor was she interrupted by

Alonzo or Hero; for, although they came into the library, they seated themselves at some distance from her, and continued in earnest conference, delivered in low whispers, until Juan summoned them to supper.

Alonzo led Hero into the parlour; lady Victoria, unnoticed, meekly followed at humble distance. They sat down to table without exchanging a word. Our heroine looked around her—no Sebastian—no Hippolyto—no Diego. She felt as if every hope had now forsaken her, and she burst into tears. Hero looked at Alonzo for permission to comfort her: but he frowned a negative; and, aiming at the manners which Don Manuel had adopted towards his lovely captive, affected not to observe her tears, and talked away with much vivacity upon a hundred frivolous subjects, as if all the party were perfectly tranquil and happy.

Victoria supped upon sighs and tears; nor did she make any effort to taste the food presented to her: but great indeed was the degree of comfort her heart derived from the appearance of Diego, who, with Teresa, came as usual to conduct her to her cham-

ber; and while Hero and Alonzo were bidding a tender adieu to each other, she informed Diego how much his absence at supper had increased the alarm and misery of her situation. He was grieved that his absence—which was occasioned by his being employed in securing the locks, &c. in her new chamber, properly for her safe accommodation—had added to her inquietude; but he felt not a little elated at the idea of his consequence.

CHAP. II.

Out of the great hall Diego led them through several narrow passages up a small staircase, which terminated in a landing-place of an hexagonal form; in every compartment of which, except that occupied by the staircase, was a large door thickly plated with iron, and a chain, with an immense padlock, hanging to each.

Victoria, shuddering, as Diego threw open the door fronting the staircase, asked Teresa, was her chamber near? who answering in the affirmative, and pointing to which, our heroine felt a degree more tranquil as she entered a large dismal room furnished in the gloomy style of ancient times. The sad-looking tapestry had been robbed by age of every bright shade which the frugal manufacturer had with sparing hand scattered upon it. Two dark green velvet beds, fringed with gold now tarnished to blackness, stood in the

room: some billets blazed cheerfully in the chimney; their baggage was arranged in proper order; and the whole room looked as if much pains had been taken to make it comfortable.

"I have arranged every thing as commodiously as I could for you, Donna Victoria," said Diego, as he lit the lamp which was to remain in the room; "and should some goblin of the castle carry your abigail away, I think it would be a kindness to you." Thus saying, he departed with Teresa. But what were Victoria's sensations, when she heard the clinking of the ponderous chain as it was flung across her door; and the jarring of the rusty key, as Diego turned it in the lock and drew it thence!—Were these sounds the heralds of safety or destruction?—She felt disposed to think well of Diego from his very great kindness to her; but still he was devoted to Don Manuel: and she trembled and doubted. To Hero she now turned her eyes with looks of sympathetic inquiry; and to her amazement, beheld her undressing before a looking-glass, with an easy air

of unconcern, which seemed to speak a perfect security of her own safety at least.

The total expulsion of that even more than feminine cowardice Hero had before upon every occasion manifested could only be accounted for in the fulfilment of Sebastian's prediction; and Victoria beheld her with horror as one devoted to the interest of the horde of villains who ruled in that mysterious place: and with additional horror she saw her step into bed without offering a single prayer to Him, whom, in the moments of fear, she had not failed to supplicate; and who, in the time of trouble and in the hour of gladness, Victoria's heart alike rested upon and adored.

Shocked, grieved, and alarmed, Victoria, enfolded in a wrapper, threw herself into a high-backed elbow chair close to the fire, and soon lost herself in a train of melancholy reflexions. Since the first night of her direful captivity, her mind had not experienced such dreadful sensations; they almost approached despair. She seemed now deprived of every friend, unless Diego should prove one; and of every sympathiser in her suffer-

ings. The fate of the amiable Octavia, so mysteriously dreadful—the absence of Sebastian and Hippolyto unaccounted for—her doubts respecting Diego—the but too certain apostasy of Hero, all combined to inspire the most gloomy ideas; and all, joined to the ambiguity and uncertainty of her own apparently hopeless horrid situation, were sufficient to subdue the courage of so young a mind.

Hero had been buried for nearly two hours in a profound sleep, and Victoria absorpt in all the horrid reflexions a mind devoid of guilt could experience, when the faint murmurs of the expiring embers in the chimney reminded her of the hour. Devoutly she now sunk upon her knees; and after some time spent in the most pure effusions of sincere piety, she arose more composed, if not more happy; and was approaching the bed intended for her, when her ears were suddenly appalled by a sound like drawing rusty bolts issuing from the floor between the beds. The instant the noise assailed her ears, she fled behind the high-backed chair: but in an instant reason, re-assuming her power,

told her how puerile was the asylum she had chosen; but it was now too late to seek another, had another more secure presented itself. The noise increased: and Victoria as she sunk to the ground, saw, from under the chair, a trap-door open in the floor where the noise had proceeded from; and ere her terrified mind had time to conjecture what this terrible chasm could portend, a ruffian arose through it, bearing in his hand a lighted torch. Victoria's blood froze at her heart; and apprehension seemed ready to cut her thread of life, ere the assassin's arm could reach her. The ruffian advanced not, but bent the torch over the gulf, as if to show light to others; and immediately after two more of his accomplices made their appearance, dragging up after them a female, who seemed through fear to have lost the power of walking.

Victoria's spirits seemed to revive—she believed the female was Octavia: but a second glance convinced her of her error—this female was a much taller, slighter, more youthful figure. The men were so totally absorpt in their employment, that they observed not the

room's being already inhabited, but dragged their hapless charge to the foot of the bed Victoria had just been going to occupy, and, taking a rope they had brought for the purpose, tied her fast by the hands to one of the bed-posts.

"Why," cried this new victim, "why, O cruel, obdurate men! am I to be bound like a malefactor, when you, alas! but too well know I cannot escape your vile machinations?"

"Fast bind, fast find," replied one of the ruffians gruffly. "You have already given us a devilish deal more of trouble than you are worth, you vixen, you! and now we have caught you, we will take care to secure you:" and so saying, without perceiving they left any light behind them in the room, he and his two confederates departed through the trap-door, which they carefully bolted after them.

Victoria now respired more freely; her senses resumed their functions; and she had power to observe this unhappy stranger, whose dress was a black robe, similar to that worn by the boarders in many convents in Spain.

Her veil, and all the ornaments of her head, were gone, except a profusion of beautiful hair, which had fallen in dishevelled luxuriance around her neck and shoulders. Her face, which was turned in profile to Victoria, seemed very youthful, and lovely in the extreme, although in some degree disfigured by the evident traces of terror, tears, and unutterable anguish. Her hands too, which were fastened together, seemed modelled with exquisite symmetry, and were of snowy whiteness.

Victoria, beholding in her a fellow-sufferer, was anxious to afford her that consolation which sympathy could give;—but how to approach her, or announce the presence of any person, without alarming the weeping stranger, made Victoria hesitate. Trembling from former apprehension, she slowly arose from the ground, and was supporting herself by the back of the chair, considering how to proceed, when a new sound assailed her ears coming from the side of the room parallel with the beds, and seemed as proceeding in a kind of hollow bound from behind the tapestry, whither Victoria directed

her eyes; and in an instant after beheld a figure in armour recede in the tapestry, leaving a black void, through which a venerable-looking old man immediately rushed, who with much agitation approached the stranger, exclaiming—

"Directed by your cries, my child, I traced you hither."

"Gracious Providence!" she almost shrieked—and, as he cut the cord that bound her, she fell senseless into his arms; and in that state he bore her through the chasm he had entered by, which instantly closed upon them, and Victoria beheld them no more.

Amazement now assumed full empire over Victoria's faculties, and, striving to account for all she had seen, subdued for some time every idea of personal fear. At length the recollection of her own calamities recurred with redoubled poignancy; and reflecting upon the singular composure of Hero, she felt convinced that she had, in some solemn undoubted manner, been assured of protection; and that to be near her was the most probable place of safety in the room. Softly, therefore, she approached Hero's bed, and

gently laid herself upon the outside of it without awaking her.

Here Victoria respired more freely, and her frame was more at ease than in the chair; but her spirits had been too much agitated to admit of sleep: and visibly fatigued, in body and mind, Teresa found her in the morning, when Diego opened the gloomy prison to admit the old woman; who was preparing to assist Victoria in dressing, when Hero, in an imperious tone of authority, commanded her attendance upon herself.

Teresa, by the contortions of her brow and lips, seemed only waiting to reply until she could find terms of reproof sufficiently severe to express her indignation at such unparalleled insolence; when Victoria, in a tone of placid sweetness, said, "Pray, Teresa, allow your humanity to give assistance to a being more helpless than I am; for although unaccustomed to dress myself, and not reared in the employment of dressing others, I think it is very possible I may contrive to put on my own clothes."

Teresa, trembling with rage, obstinately continued officiating about Victoria's toilet,

and would not move a single step to offer the smallest assistance to Hero; who, a little disconcerted by Victoria's sarcasm, did not venture to repeat her command, but contrived to adorn herself in the most becoming manner; and took care to lead the way down stairs, and to enter the parlour before our heroine, who was much delighted to find Sebastian there with Alonzo.

When breakfast was ended, Victoria and her venerable friend strolled into the library; and while they affected to be engaged by books, Victoria recounted all her fears, and all the realities that had occurred since they separated the preceding day.

Sebastian truly sympathised in her sufferings, and deplored that his unavoidable absence had augmented her alarms. "Important business had called him away," he said; "and was sorry to inform her that he must leave her again in half an hour: but," continued he, "I think you may consider yourself perfectly secure at present, my dear child, Don Manuel having again sent strict orders for your safety; and although you may meet numberless alarms, no real danger awaits you,

at least until his return; and then we must trust in the goodness of Providence for finding means to protect you still."

Victoria sighed piteously, but was thankful for even this short period of certain safety. "The absence of Hippolyto, too," said she, "made me feel more forlorn. Have I lost that friend, signior?"

"Heaven forbid, my child! An affair of consequence called him hence yesterday; he is not yet returned; and if he stays much longer, I shall indeed entertain a thousand apprehensions for his safety."

"May Providence protect him!" said Victoria: "and he seems too amiable not to be the peculiar care of Heaven."

"Ah! my child, all who are amiable have not (for some wise reason, no doubt) the same protection from above," Sebastian replied; and then fell into a deep and apparently painful musing.

Victoria, guessing that the sad fate of his unfortunate pupil now agitated his mind, wished to withdraw his ideas from so distressing a subject; and not comfortable in the thought of having some other person's

valuable property in her possession, drew the picture from her pocket; and telling Sebastian how it came into her hands, begged to know if he could tell her to whom it belonged.

Sebastian looked at it, and declared he could give her no information relative to it.

"Alas! then, what shall I do with it, signior?"

"Keep it until you hear it inquired for. A thing of so much value, depend upon it, will not remain long unclaimed. In the mean time, I would not have you mention it; for so mysterious is this place, that a thousand to one but the trifling circumstance of your finding this portrait might turn out the means of subjecting some innocent person to destruction! The way in which you found it leads me to believe something of mystery annexed to it that puzzles me. Were it plundered from some unhappy traveller, the robber would have been more careful of it; and the freshness of the colouring must lead us to suppose it recently drawn, and that therefore it could not have fallen from a place of long concealment, when the dæmons of

mischief conveyed away your poor companion's bed."

"From this colouring, certainly, as well as from the brilliancy of the gems, and from the modern style of the setting, we have every reason to suppose this picture very lately drawn," said Victoria; and with eagerness she spoke; "and therefore I should suppose it not impossible, signior, that the original is still in existence."

"Certainly," replied Sebastian, "we may suppose it and wish it too; as the countenance seems to proclaim the possession of many mental as well as personal perfections."

"Oh! of every perfection. These eyes, signior, speak the language of a heart replete with virtues, and a mind glowing with every grace that wisdom and genius could inspire; and—" Victoria suddenly ceased, deeply blushing at the energy of her expressions. Sebastian still listened attentively for the completion of the sentence—She blushed a still deeper hue; and after two or three efforts to articulate without embarrassment, she continued—"I spoke with the enthusiasm of an

amateur in painting, signior. I was accustomed to draw a great deal in my days of happiness, and ever took delight in pourtraying beautiful and expressive countenances—how charmed should I then have been to have had so fine a head as this to copy!"

"Can you not copy it now, my fair enthusiastic artless artist?" said Sebastian with an arch smile.

"Oh! signior, no. The hand trembling with apprehension ill could guide a pencil."

"But although indifferently executed," replied Sebastian gravely, "the attempt might amuse you; and as much as possible you ought to divert your thoughts from your hapless situation: else, my sweet child, your mind and frame will become too much enervated to support you through those trials which may here await you."

"Then, signior, I will make the attempt: not that my feeble pencil, now more enfeebled by fear, can ever trace perfection like this."

"I believe," said Sebastian, "I can furnish you with materials."

"It is probable," she replied, "that my own baggage can supply me: I have never

yet found sufficient courage to inspect it; but have no doubt my drawing implements were sent with me."

Sebastian thought she might venture to her chamber, and draw there for an hour or more without the smallest probability of any interruption, he having overheard Alonzo tell Hero that he would take her round the ramparts; and he knew Diego and Juan would be busily employed for a couple of hours to come.

The half hour was now elapsed that Sebastian could remain with our heroine. Reluctantly she saw him depart; and unmolested she gained her own chamber, the door of which she carefully closed after her; and by no means devoid of apprehension, notwithstanding her venerable friend's assurances, she set about the inspection of her baggage; in which she was not long engaged, until she suddenly ceased.

"What folly is this!" thought she: "can a wretched being like me, persecuted, friendless, forlorn, without a spot to rest securely in, trembling at every sound, and appalled at even the beating of my own heart, can I

pretend to guide a pencil, or think to find amusement in an attempt like this? Ah! no, no. Sebastian rather hoped than thought I could make the effort."

Victoria now replaced all of her baggage which she had removed, and resolved to return to the library, where she would summon Teresa, as her nerves were so weakened by constant apprehension, she did not like to remain by herself secluded from the inhabited part of the castle: but beyond conception was her dismay and consternation, when, on trying to open the door, she found it immoveably fastened by a common spring lock, which could only be opened by the key, which was now at the other side, and every essay to force it proved unsuccessful!

Wearied by her ineffectual efforts, and finding no bell in the room, she at length threw herself into a chair, in a state of the most torturing apprehension. It is impossible to follow the human mind involved in perplexity through every new idea, so rapidly they arise: but, by a long concatenation, Victoria was led from the deepest abyss of despair into the calm sunshine of hope; and

better to deserve the protection of that Providence she so firmly depended upon, she devoutly sunk upon her knees, and for some moments soared beyond the scenes of her sufferings:—but to horror inexpressible was she soon recalled by the drawing of the trap-door bolts, sounds so forcibly impressed upon her senses the preceding night, that they instantly roused her from her knees—but to what purpose?—The door was firmly fastened, and her retreat that way cut off—day-light would not favour her concealment in the room, as night had done. What could she do? The door in the tapestry at this moment darted into her remembrance: almost frantic with fear and eagerness, she flew towards it, and strove with all her force to open it, but in vain. The trap-door began to sink. Wildly she clasped her hands, and in raising them, while she invoked the aid of Heaven, struck them against the warrior's shield; when immediately the figure receded, leaving space sufficient for her to pass through; which, as may be supposed, she lost no time in doing; and cautiously closing the aperture after her, she found herself in total darkness; at least

the transition from clear light to a faint glimmering of it made it appear so to her for several moments; during which she feared to move, or almost allow her heart the quick and loud pulsation apprehension had roused it to, as she knew not where to move her feet with safety, or whether the men whom she heard speaking in the room she had just escaped from would not trace her to where she had flown for refuge.

At length her eyes, accustomed to the change of light, began by degrees to distinguish objects; and she found herself to be at the top of a narrow cylindrical staircase, closely encompassed by stone-work, through which light was admitted by small chinks.

Upon discovering the staircase, she resolved to venture down. Apprehensively she descended a number of steps, which at length terminated in a landing-place of circular form; in which, to her inexpressible astonishment and chagrin, she could see no door, nor any possible method of further progress.

What was now to be her fate? She was uncertain that a return to her chamber even n some hours after would be attended with

safety; and if it would, she was not sure but the pass she had escaped by was secured against her return by some impenetrable secret. Minutely she searched every part of the landing-place for some channel to lead her to a more secure retreat; for that the old man and his daughter had benefited by one the preceding night she could have no doubt.

Full of chagrin at her cruel destiny, that would not permit her finding out this secret so essential to her safety, she sat down upon the last step of the staircase, and there ruminated upon her hapless situation. At night, no doubt, when Hero retired to her chamber, she should be enabled by her means—if every other failed—to extricate herself from this gloomy prison: but should she be compelled to announce the place of her concealment, it must naturally point out the way by which the old man and his child escaped, and perhaps prove the means of that interesting female's destruction. This idea was so painful to her feeling generous mind, that she resolved self-preservation alone should force her to attempt the discovery of where

she had flown for refuge. But should she not find out any method of escape, and that at night Hero, by the influence of cruel fate, might not retire to that chamber, what was to become of her? She shuddered—but hastily dismissed the agonising thought, still building hope upon that power her soul rested upon for protection.

About an hour Victoria had remained in doleful contemplation, when in changing her position, she perceived the step upon which she sat was made of oak, while all the rest were formed of stone. "Why should this step be unlike the others?" was a question that naturally and instantly occurred, and as instantly the cause was conjectured; and almost as quickly as the question and answer were formed, she was busily employed in examination of the step; when, to her ineffable transport, she discovered hinges to it close to the bottom of the step above it, almost obscured by the dim light of the place, and by a quantity of dust time had lodged upon it, but which evidently had lately been disturbed. The situation of the hinges led her to know the step lifted up like the lid of a

chest; she trembled with apprehension lest it should be fastened withinside; and almost feared to try, lest she should experience the grief and disappointment of finding it so. At length calling upon the aid of Heaven, she, with a very trifling exertion, raised the lid, and beheld some small steps in an oblique direction, up which a faint glimmering of day-light emanated. She almost shrieked for joy, and without hesitation began to descend. Carefully she closed the place after her; and when she reached the last step, she found herself suspended over a large flat marble, separated from the bottom of the staircase upon which she stood by a distance of about three feet. Without scruple Victoria jumped upon the platform, and, stooping down to disencumber her head from the building which concealed the staircase, discovered a flight of about a dozen steps from one end of the platform, which in front was screened by a structure of great breadth and immense height.

CHAP. III.

Victoria paused for a few moments, to recover breath, and to consider whether she should dare to venture further. Horrors greater than those she had encountered within the three last weeks of her life could scarcely assail her. She had escaped without injury from the past; and, firmly relying upon the care of Heaven, hoped to meet with the same protection still.

These ideas led our heroine down the steps; when she found herself in an immense aisle of a Gothic church, on each side of which were ranged monuments and shrines of beautiful structure; and the place she had just emerged from was most curiously concealed from common observation by a shrine of wonderful beauty, where lay the relics of a female saint.

Struck with awe the most reverential for this hallowed place, Victoria believed herself

to be in a sacred sanctuary, where the assassin's arm had not power to reach her. Slowly advancing, still at every step invoking protection from each saint whose ashes lay there enshrined, she ventured forward; the solemn gloom of the place inspiring sensations not dissimilar to those awakened by apprehension. At length she reached the termination of the aisle; and a large folding door before her kindled for a moment the brightest rays of hope within her bosom. But too soon were they extinguished: the door was strongly barred, and fastened by immense locks, which she had no means to open.

Not knowing what plan to pursue, and quite lost in painfully-perplexing musing, she unconsciously walked up the aisle again, passed the shrine she had emerged from, and, before she could collect her ideas into a state for forming any rational plan, reached the other extremity of the aisle, where stood a most superb and beautiful monument almost in ruins—the only remaining part of which that had escaped the despoiling hand of time and cold neglect instantly awakened her attention. Resting upon the ruins of a magnificent base

was a large black marble coffin; close to which an elegant figure of a female, in fine white marble, knelt in an attitude of grief and lamentation;—objects which Victoria at once recognised to be the identical ones she had beheld through the aperture in the library, and which had given birth to such fear and surprise. But a short time since and she would have laughed at the phantoms of her own imagination: now they were the phantoms her acquaintance with misery had created, and her mind was no longer to be influenced by mirth.

By having seen this monument from the library, she knew this aisle adjoined that room; but whether this hallowed place appertained to Don Manuel's part of the castle, or to Francisco's, she could only conjecture; and as it unquestionably was the channel through which, on the preceding night, the old man had been led to rescue his child from Don Manuel's ruffians, and convey her to some sanctuary near, she naturally concluded that it must therefore be sacred from the power of Don Manuel and his adherents, at least; if not, a secret to them. The more

she pursued and reasoned upon this suggestion, the more she felt persuaded of its probability. Hope now again stole into her tortured breast, re-animating her drooping spirits. She respired more freely; her pulse throbbed and her heart palpitated with less violence. Relieved from the icy chill of fear, the blood revisited her lips and cheeks; she could stand without trembling, and look around undaunted. She had here no companions but the dead; and young as she was, the powers of her mind assured her she had only the living to fear: and as she now believed herself in a sanctuary, sacred from the wicked, she resolved to explore every spot around her, to try if Heaven would permit her to find out the way by which the old man and his lovely daughter had escaped.

To the right from where Victoria was then standing, branched off, through a large Gothic arch, a dark vault-roofed passage, which seemed as if it led to another aisle running parallel with that she was in. Through this passage she at once determined to go. She descended three or four steps into it, and after moving on a few paces, discovered

the nave of the church, separated from the passage by a thick iron grating, through which there was no entrance. She therefore proceeded onwards, and ascending the same number of steps, entered the other aisle; when instantly, upon glancing her eye along it, to her utter dismay she beheld a man, in the dress appropriate to the hidalgo, standing with his back towards her; his *capa* gracefully twisted round his arms, which seemed folded in an attitude of meditation.

Fear would have prompted instant retreat; yet hope whispering, "This may possibly be the old man," she stopped, and stole another glance; but saw not the figure of age, nor the smallest resemblance to the object she wished at that moment to behold. The form was so fine, that busy fancy, still searching for new objects of alarm, suggested the idea of his being Don Manuel: but another look convincing her this form was slighter, and more youthful, she hesitated whether to retire, or implore the protection of the stranger: but ere she had time for determination, he suddenly turned and advanced towards

her, his eyes bent to the ground, as if still musing.

With the electric spring of apprehension Victoria bounded to her retreat; but in her terror, forgetful of the steps, she stumbled and fell with a half articulated exclamation of distress. In a moment she found herself raised and supported by the stranger. Apprehension now almost deprived her of every faculty: she could not speak, and feared to look upon him, who in the gentlest tones of kindness and compassion soothed her with assurances of perfect safety.

There was something in the sound of the stranger's melodious voice that almost instantly dissipated her dismay, and her alarmed spirits soon felt the influence of some tranquillising power: and at length she assumed courage sufficient to look upon him to whose humanity she was thus indebted, when every other feeling was absorpt in pleasing astonishment—the original of the so much admired portrait was her compassionate supporter.

Surprise seemed now to have a mutual effect upon both; each appeared agitated and

embarrassed; the stranger still, however, endeavouring to calm Victoria's visible perturbation, by making solemn assurances of her having nothing to fear there, where he could not but express infinite astonishment at finding her.

Victoria, making every effort to calm her fluttered spirits, and collect her mental faculties, gently disengaged herself from the stranger's grasp, and, supporting herself against a pillar of the arcade, succinctly related the manner in which she became Don Manuel's captive, and how by an alarm she had been accidentally led to find a passage into those aisles; suppressing, however, the incident of the old man and his daughter, lest she should, by mentioning all she knew of their flight to this young man, unintentionally prove the means of betraying them to their enemies.

The stranger appeared sensibly affected by her interesting artless narrative; and, after deploring the calamities of her situation, tenderly entreated her to sit down a while, until she should perfectly recover the excessive perturbation her fall had occasioned:

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then with respectful anxious kindness, he led her to the base of a monument in the adjoining aisle, and seating himself beside her, continued to speak with the moſt animated energy, although in a low yet distinct voice.

"Would to heaven," he said, "the power was mine to snatch you from the dangers and horrors I too well know every hapless captive in this dreadful castle is encompassed with! But alas! so am I circumstanced, that my ardent wish to serve the innocent, and crush the wretches who have torn every fibre of my bleeding heart, by cruelties to those I love, must wait the tardy and mysterious measures of those, my gratitude has bound me to obey. To rescue from all the accumulated horrors of a dreadful captivity here, and to save from a deep and direful scheme of diabolical villany a being dearer to me than language can express, was I drawn hither; and although I now find another amiable and lovely woman a devoted victim to the same insatiate monsters of iniquity, my indignant soul, my bursting heart, must throb, must swell, in silent anguish, and my uplifted arm delay the blow, Heaven permits it not yet to strike,

since at this moment obstacles impede my measures, which my single efforts could not surmount. I must submit, with a heart torn by agonising apprehensions for the safety of those dearer far to me than my own existence, until fate, in its own hour, permits my attempting the deliverance of those I pant to release from misery and bondage. That hour, I am taught to hope, is not far distant; and when I am allowed to rescue from impending destruction that lovely amiable being, for whose happiness I am so deeply interested, rest assured that your dreadful captivity shall terminate."

Victoria could thank him only with her tears; which the tender pity his looks, words, and manner all expressed, had taught to flow.

The stranger, apparently much affected, continued:—"Bound by a solemn and sacred oath to conceal from every individual in the power of Don Manuel the griefs, perplexities, and mysteries by which I am now encompassed, not even to secure your confidence, by being as explicit as my heart would now prompt me to be, can I violate that sa-

cred vow given to him, whom affection and pity have led into imminent and manifold dangers for me. Fettered as I thus am, I am conscious I can only appear to you as a doubtful character, and dare scarcely hope that any assertions of mine in favour of my own integrity can find faith with you: yet, under these too obvious disadvantages, I must presume to entreat you to believe, that for worlds I would not injure or deceive you; and firmly to rely upon my intention and power of soon releasing you from your dreadful captivity."

"Ah, signior," replied Victoria, "wishing to find you sincere, I feel but too much inclined to believe that truth speaks when you do; but feeling should not alone dictate our opinions, and to judgment I dare not apply, since mine is an untried one. Accustomed from my earliest days to the guidance of those, who were fully equal to the task, I trod no path but those they led me through. My guides were skilful, and I had no exertions to make—nothing to fear: but now, alas! tossed upon a stormy sea, encompassed by perils that threaten each

moment inevitable destruction; bereft of my pilot, my every support, trembling, I still look around for succour—still hoping to meet it, still fearing to be deceived."

"Oh that I might be your pilot, your protector!' exclaimed the stranger energetically; "and, as you are now persecuted, comfortless, forlorn, so may I be followed by the just vengeance of Heaven, and become of every hope bereft, if I deceive you."

Victoria was sensibly affected, while doubt and perplexity compelled her to silence. Her first feelings were those of firm reliance upon the stranger's honour and sincerity; and it was with much difficulty prudence could repress those expressions of implicit confidence her heart would have else inspired, by reminding her that in Don Manuel was a striking illustration of specious villany; like whom this stranger, under an appearance the most amiable, might conceal a heart of treachery: and yet, was he really what he wore the semblance of, and what she felt powerfully inclined to believe him to be—honest and sincere,—how ungra-

cious, nay, absolutely ungrateful, must her silence appear! since she well knew nothing could be more ungenial to a friendly and benevolent heart, than to find its offers of kindness and assistance only meet with cold civility and chilling suspicion. Embarrassed and distressed, she raised her beautifully intelligent eyes, beaming with seraphic sweetness, to implore the inspiration of unerring Providence to actuate and guide her.

The stranger, easily developing the conflict of Victoria's mind, hastily exclaimed, in visible emotion, "Why, oh! why am I not permitted at once to extinguish all these suspicions, which are so unjust to me, and but too painful to your own ingenuous mind to shelter? Why must I not dare to convey you to the safe and honourable protection of that beloved being, who shares in every interest, in every feeling of my heart? From her friendship and protection the trembling delicacy of your mind would not shrink; for lovely, amiable, interesting, and unfortunate like yourself, you would in hers find a kindred heart. She would, with the tender solicitude of sisterly affection, sooth your cares, dispel

your doubts, and shelter you from horror, until the hour of liberation: but a strange and too cruelly mysterious destiny forbids the realising of this my ardent wish. Yet do not, I conjure you, cherish suspicions of my honour; believe me, it is unmerited. Look upon me, I implore you, as a brother; as a friend faithful to your interest, devoted to your cause."

"No occasion having ever occurred in my days of peace and happiness to call forth the exertions of intellectual virtues," replied Victoria, whilst tears stole unbidden down her pallid cheeks, the soft effusions of that gratitude she now no longer doubted was the stranger's due, "I know not how great or how trifling may be the store of them which I possess; and now, when called upon to think for, to act for myself, I cannot but hesitate, I cannot but tremble, at the decisions of an untried judgment. Illusions may arise to beguile my inexperienced prudence: but as I wish to act with rectitude, Heaven I trust, will guide me; and under the idea of this influence I feel as if inspired with firm confidence in your faith, as if I ought to

consider you my friend, as if it would be sacrilege against truth and honour to cherish a doubt of your sincerity."

"Believe," returned the stranger with the most animated fervour, "that the same purity which influences your mind actuates my intentions. I may prove unfortunate in your service; but rest assured you shall never, no never, find me unworthy that confidence you may be induced to repose in me."

At that moment a clock struck one, and a dismal bell tolled sadly on the instant; and the stranger precipitately arose from his seat in evident chagrin.

"Alas!" said he, "friendship compels me to distress you. I must intreat your immediate return to the castle, since here with safety you can remain no longer."

"Alas!" exclaimed Victoria, bursting into tears, "and must I return to the castle?—must I *indeed*, signior?" and her voice fell to such a piteous cadence, that savage ears alone could have heard her unmoved. The stranger's bosom heaved with suppressed emotion; a tear of pity increased the lustre of his fine eyes; and after a painful pause of

agitation, he spoke in a voice that falteringly betrayed how much he was affected.

"I fear you must; since I know, alas! of no alternative. Be assured there are forcible and invincible reasons for your return into the castle, or, Heaven knows, I would be one of the last persons upon earth to urge it. Was your absence to be discovered by Don Manuel's people before the moment ordained for your effectual escape, or were you to be found here by those whom that bell may draw hither, your destruction would be inevitable. I must therefore consign you to temporary misery, to save you from permanent ruin, and effect your immediate return by a secret way which was lately revealed to me." Respectfully he now took her passive, fear-chilled hand, and led her through the arcade into the first aisle she had entered, still speaking in gentlest accents as they walked along.

"Do not consider me languid in friendship, or devoid of spirit or humanity," said he, "because I do not now boldly attempt your escape. Believe me, no mortal strength or stratagem could *now* effect it. To rescue beings infinitely dearer to me than existence

from the diabolical community of the castle, has been for some time past the sole purpose of my mind; and I have found it an enterprise of such hazard and difficulty, that it requires the council and aid of judgment and power far superior to my own; but, as I have every reason to believe success will, ere long, bless my anxious undertaking, I must intreat the friends I would serve, to call forth all the forces of their minds, to sustain them through those severe trials I fear they may be doomed to encounter until the hour of emancipation."

"The dangers and difficulties which your humanity leads you into well merit from us every attention to your wishes," replied Victoria; "and was I but certain Don Manuel would not return to his castle whilst I am destined to remain there, I think I could meet whatever trials I am doomed to there with some degree of firmness."

"Don Manuel," said the stranger in evident emotion, "is at present engaged in a business of a most diabolical nature; which, though involved in difficulties, dangers, perplexity, and mystery, so determined is he upon success, that nothing, I am persuaded,

can induce him to relinquish it at present; so that before he returns to the castle I have no doubt of your being restored to liberty."

By this time they reached the monument of the black coffin, where they stopped. The stranger, springing up behind the figure, pressed a small brass plate concealed among the decorations of a marble tablet, apparently fixed to the wall, but which advanced several inches from its station the moment he touched the plate. Cautiously looking through the small chasm which prudence suffered him to make, "All is safe," he said; "you now may fearlessly venture without any danger of discovery." Then instructing her in the nature and situation of the springs, which on both sides actuated this pannel, he proceeded: "From eleven to one each day you may venture hither, without any apprehension of observers upon either side; but ever cautiously close the pannel after you have effected your purpose; and, as I may have many things of consequence to communicate to you, it will be absolutely necessary for us sometimes to meet; nay, I ought to see you every

day, for the moment of escape may arrive when I least expect it, and I shall have no other means of informing you of it. You must not, cannot, therefore, object to grant me frequent interviews. Promise," continued he beseechingly, "to meet me at this spot by twelve to-morrow."

"I promise," replied Victoria, blushing, "since I feel persuaded I have no perfidy to apprehend from you; and I, alas! cannot now consider what propriety would dictate in situations less forlorn and wretched than my own."

The stranger, with the liveliest touches of joy and gratitude beaming over his fine and intelligent countenance, gracefully thanked her for the confidence she honoured him with: then, presenting his hand to her, he assisted her in ascending the pedestal; and opening the aperture wide enough to admit her, "It is almost unnecessary for me," he said, "to intreat a total silence relative to me, and your discovery of this place, which, strange as it may appear to you, is yet a secret to Don Manuel and his associates." Then respect-

fully bowing, he continued: "Farewell until to-morrow. May Heaven protect you!—Believe me your friend."

"Farewell! and may Heaven bless you, my friend!" Victoria falteringly articulated, as she passed into the library. The stranger closed the pannel, and Victoria sunk upon the sofa beneath it, in a perturbation of spirits not to be described, and scarcely to be conceived. The variety of sensations her agitated mind had undergone since she parted from Sebastian, all left some trace behind them: but Hope, although a trembler, shot some soothing sun-beams through her breast; while admiration of her new friend, and pleasing astonishment at finding in her promised deliverer the original of that mysteriously-found portrait she so much was charmed with, bore no inconsiderable share in her emotions; whilst the danger she had incurred of observation, in the moment of entering the library, made her shudder with those painful emotions which just escaped danger often as powerfully awakens as still impending peril. But how were those feelings of

just avoided destruction augmented, when but in a few moments after, Diego entered the room! He approached her with a respectful bow; and while his countenance bore evident marks of agitation, he spoke to her thus:

"Finding that signior Alonzo had chosen to take your domestic from her attendance upon you, donna, I came to these apartments to learn if you wished for Teresa to remain with you; but here you were not, donna, and I have been since all through the grounds and castle in quest of you, full of apprehension for your safety—at a loss to account for your disappearance." He looked with such a scrutinising gaze upon her, that Victoria believed her retreat to the church was discovered; and while her countenance pourtrayed all the terror of alarm, she trembled with increasing violence.

"Donna!" exclaimed Diego in a tone and with a look of strongly-marked penetrating inquiry, "donna! I must ask, what has occurred to cause such extraordinary agitation?"

"Unnecessary question!" replied Victoria, bursting into tears. "Am I not in Don Manuel's castle?"

"And what then?" said Diego sternly.

"Because," returned Victoria, quickly recalling her mental powers,—"because, although protected by you, I am yet a stranger here; and the gloom and loneliness, you must excuse me if I add, the mysteries of the place, cannot but awaken agitation and alarm without new causes."

Diego respectfully retreated several paces from her, while the sternness of his countenance gave way to a placid but solemn tone. "Have a care, donna," he said, "that you are not in pursuit of the phantom Escape: but I hope, and trust, the suspicions which your long absence awakened were groundless." For a moment he paused, and then proceeded, gazing keenly at her, as if to develop more than she might choose to reveal.

"You rested undisturbed in your apartment last night, I hope, donna?"

Victoria perfectly understood his meaning: her conscious heart beat quick with

fear of a discovery of that secret she was in possession of; yet her anxious wish to conceal the means of the female's escape awakened dissimulation in her guileless bosom, and taught her the subterfuge of prevarication.

"You promised me an apartment," she replied with sarcastic emphasis, "where I should rest undisturbed. Confiding in your sincerity, I had no apprehension of your deceiving me; and you, to whom the secrets of this castle are so well known, can entertain no doubt of how tranquilly I passed my night."

Diego in his turn now appeared embarrassed and confused: he hesitated some moments ere he could articulate with firmness. "Well should I deserve your sarcasm, donna, was I to blame. I had no idea that any thing could occur to alarm you in that chamber; and was, until this morning, totally unacquainted with the circumstance that did so: however, I still hoped you had slept undisturbed by those from whom you had no danger to apprehend. Let not this, donna, weaken your faith in me: believe me faithful, and you shall find me so. Yet, if

you feel in the least degree averse to sleeping in that chamber, you shall have another prepared for your reception.".

Victoria, who had now very powerful motives for wishing to retain that apartment, from whence, in the moment of danger, she had a chance of securing a retreat; and believing that all chambers in that castle were equally accessible; at once resolved to affect implicit confidence in Diego's faith, as the most likely means of gratifying that wish, and insuring his protection.

"I think," replied she, endeavouring to conceal her anxiety by speaking with composure, "I think I may place a firm reliance upon your sincerity. I desire no other chamber, and shall consider myself perfectly secure there, if you assure me I have nothing to apprehend."

Diego felt so pleased and so flattered, that the sweetest smiles of benevolence and satisfaction illumined his strikingly fine countenance; and the savage ruffian seemed in one instant to be softened into the semblance of every benign and social virtue.

"May I perish the moment after, if I de-

ceive you!" exclaimed he emphatically, whilst the fire of truth flashed from his speaking eyes. "Every species of alarm or danger which I can foresee or prevent, you shall rest in that chamber securely from."

"I went thither this morning to arrange my wardrobe," said Victoria, "and was chased from thence by alarm, upon those men again opening that horrid passage."

"They shall alarm you no more: they went there this morning in pursuit of another, not you, donna; but that person has by some miracle—or perhaps you—and yet —no, no, that could not be:"—he hesitated, paused for a moment, and then proceeded, so occupied by the perplexities of his mind, that he observed not the pitiable confusion he had thrown Victoria into.

"I must request that you will, donna, relate every incident that occasioned your alarm last night: and beware, I intreat you, how you suppress a single circumstance, left you endanger your own safety by doing so."

This implicated threat shook her courage but not her rectitude, which instantly determined her, even should her own life prove

the sacrifice, not to betray the innocent; and, again, the situation she was involved in led her to what, in other circumstances, the ingenuousness of her mind would have recoiled from—the subterfuge of evasion.

"I was alarmed," she replied, "by the drawing of rusty bolts; and immediately after I beheld a chasm in the floor, through which a ruffian of horrid aspect arose. You cannot surely wonder that terror, in such a moment, should annihilate every perception; or that I can tell you no one circumstance that occurred after that dreadful moment, until I recovered from the effect of my apprehensions, when I found my chamber in possession of only Hero and myself, and every thing around remaining in the same state exactly that they were before the ruffian entered."

"It is strange! very strange!" said Diego thoughtfully: then, after a pause, he again addressed Victoria: "I pledge myself, donna, for your safety through the night, during the absence of Don Manuel: but in the day-time, I am sorry to say, I can only promise you that protection my arm can give you, since to Alonzo's care my master has committed your

days; and from my soul I wish he had not!" He now looked cautiously around, and lowering his voice continued: "I know not why it is, but every hour I feel more and more convinced that I could not injure you, even if commanded to it by my master, whose orders, during many years—although often torturing to my feelings—I have never disobeyed; and Alonzo makes me tremble for you. He is a villain for villany's sake; not even faithful to his commander when his own interest intervenes. I am certain he now has mischief in his head—in his heart it ever is; and he is training that vile miscreant, your attendant, to be the instrument of his treachery. Beware of them both; and go no where with them unaccompanied by signior Sebastian, Hippolyto, or myself. Hippolyto's suspicions of him first awakened mine, and you will find us both equally vigilant in warding off, if possible, all impending danger from you."

"Oh, may Heaven recompence both you and him for your benevolent kindness to me!" exclaimed Victoria, with streaming eyes. "As for me, poor and forlorn as I am, I can,

alas! only thank my friends, and feel my obligations to them."

"Alas! donna," returned Diego, "small is the service within our power to do for you; but could we essentially benefit you, the only recompence that we should wish for, would be to behold you happy."

Victoria took off a valuable ring, and, presenting it to Diego, said, "Accept this as a small testimony of my confidence in your faith."

"As such I receive it," he replied, bowing respectfully. "But first you must understand the full extent of my promises. Firmly bound by the ties of gratitude to Don Manuel, the world could not tempt me to betray him, or prove false to his interest; I therefore cannot aid you in an escape from hence, nor would I suffer you to make it, if in my power to prevent you: but even at the hazard of my life will I preserve you from every danger here, unless my master should command me to cease protecting you."

"Alas! I can expect no more," said Victoria mournfully. "But tell me, my good friend, how I can beware of Hero and Alonzo, when so many hours each day I

am without other protection than that of Heaven."

"Do you know how to fire off a pistol?" replied Diego, after a pause of consideration: "and do you possess sufficient courage to make use of one, if driven to extremity?"

"Desperation would certainly be the best stimulus to my courage," answered Victoria; "and I know not what self-preservation might inspire. My brother, in happier days and in a sportive humour, taught me to fire; though little, little thinking that I should ever have occasion to reap advantage from such a masculine acquirement.

Diego drew a small pistol from his belt, and, giving it to her—"Conceal this," said he, "in your girdle, amongst the folds of your drapery, where it will be at hand should occasion call forth an exertion which I am well aware will be highly repugnant to your feelings: but necessity possesses powerful incentives; and I may venture to promise that the sight of it will be alone sufficient to intimidate Alonzo from any purpose, since he is the veriest coward that ever chose Satan for a guide."

Victoria with a sad heart and trembling hand disposed of the pistol as Diego had directed; when he again repeated his solemn promise of affording her every protection, and then departed to execute some domestic business, well knowing that his lovely charge had then no danger to apprehend, since Alonzo's projects, whatever they might be, he was certain where not yet ripe for performance.

Victoria, again left to ruminate upon the horrors of her fate, soon was buried in profound and painful meditation. Amongst the numerous subjects which occupied her thoughts, the portrait was not forgotten; the original of which she had found more, infinitely more, amiable and fascinating than even his striking resemblance had bespoke him to be. She wished to have it in her power to see the object of his attachment, whose perfections he had mentioned with all the ardour of unfeigned admiration and tenderness. Heavily she sighed as fancy resounded his words, and retraced the softened expression of his countenance, whenever he mentioned this beloved being; who, at length it occurred to her, might be the identical female, so

beautiful, so fascinating, so interesting, who had caused her alarm the preceding night. The more she thought upon this idea, the more she was convinced of the probability of it; and if it really was so, she could not—no, she could not wonder at the strength and tenderness of his attachment. Fervently she wished them as happy as they apparently deserved to be; but she, alas! she knew, was never, never to be happy more. Her cheek sunk in pensive sadness on her hand, her elbow resting upon one arm of the sopha: sadder and sadder she became, until she fell into a state almost approaching to despondence; when some new idea awakened Hope, upon whose pinions she soared, and all her thoughts flew up to heaven. Prostrate she fell, her hands uplifted: for succour she implored, and to be inspired with a patient acquiescence in the wise decrees of Providence. The tear of piety glistened in her eyes; its purest glow mantled o'er her cheeks; she felt fortitude and resolution taking possession of her soul, while resignation diffused its balmy influence through her tranquillising mind. In this moment Sebastian entered; but, as she be-

held him not, he gazed in silent admiration upon her, too much respecting her employment to attempt an interruption. At length she arose, re-assumed her seat, and Sebastian approached her.

"You look more cheerful and composed, my child," said he affectionately, "than when I parted from you this morning: and, may I ask, is this happy change effected by your intercourse with the Deity, or from any circumstance occurring to blunt the poignancy of your misery?"

"By both, my dear signior," she replied, deeply blushing at having any terrestrial witness of her fervent devotion, which had sprung from the impulse of her heart in a moment when she believed herself perfectly secure from observation, "since I cannot but allow the soother Hope to draw auspicious inferences from the kindness of Providence, in raising to me so many friends, where I might so well expect to find myself destitute of any—you, my good signior, Hippolyto, poor Teresa, and Diego. Few children of misfortune can enumerate so many friends."

"Diego did you say, my child?"

Victoria briefly related all that had passed in her last interview with Diego. Sebastian was astonished:—Diego, a man who, though no villain by nature, was so strangely infatuated by gratitude to his master, that he ever performed with the most rigid punctuality every command, however torturing to his own feelings, of Don Manuel.

"He is surely inspired by Heaven to befriend me!" said Victoria.

"And softened to pity," added Sebastian, "by the fascinating resignation of the youthful innocent sufferer."

"Ah! signior, I can claim no merit for my resignation; for what could it avail me to murmur at my fate, hapless and singular as it is?"

"It certainly could avail nothing but to increase your misery. Yet few there are, my sweet philosopher, who possess sufficient virtue to submit with unmurmuring acquiescence to such harsh dispensations of Providence."

"But when I reflect, signior, that Providence is supreme in wisdom, ever kind to its creatures, and ordaining all things for

our ultimate good, although too often perverted by our own blindness and folly from the intended effect, how can I dare to murmur? My heart must feel; the woman may tremble; but reason and religion teach me resignation to those severe trials, deemed for some wise, although to my shallow faculties impenetrable reason, necessary for me to encounter for my essential advantage, if not here, at least in a better world."

Sebastian expressed much genuine pleasure at finding her fortitude and resignation springing from a base not likely to yield—from the only foundation that could have supported the firmness of her mind amid such a variety and accumulation of horrors. Sebastian too was profoundly pious; and they now talked of the Deity and his attributes until they almost forgot their captivity and griefs; and their sublimated minds gave to their countenances sweet touches of tranquil serenity, such as vice could never wear even in the regions of prosperity.

In some moments after the cessation of their cheering, although serious, conversation, Sebastian asked if Victoria had yet at-

tempted to sketch the portrait. Victoria, blushing, answered in the negative; and Sebastian wishing again to view it, she presented it to him in total silence.

"It certainly is a very fine picture, both in subject and execution," said he. Victoria spoke not, and he continued:

"If I have any skill in physiognomy, the original of this miniature was blessed with great mental as well as personal perfections. Do you not agree with me, lady Victoria?"

Victoria felt painfully embarrassed, and hesitatingly answered, "I think—Yes, signior —certainly."

"Yet there is an expression of the most profound melancholy to be discerned here," continued Sebastian, still gazing upon the picture, "notwithstanding that tone of sweetness fortitude has evidently spread over the countenance. It is pitiable to think so young and so amiable a looking man should be unfortunate. If I may presume to form conjectures, his griefs were caused by hopeless love."

Victoria sighed deeply; although she was pretty certain, from what the stranger said

to her, his attachment was not a hopeless one.

"I think the woman must have a flinty heart," said Sebastian, "who could be insensible to such perfections."

So thought his lovely and attentive auditress, yet she spoke not one word.

"But perhaps all these perfections are only ideal, and that the artist pourtrayed from the bold flights of his brilliant imagination; whilst the person he was called upon to delineate was in no way so amiable, so handsome, or so fascinating, as this picture would lead us to suppose him."

"Oh! but he is indeed! even ten thousand times more so, signior, if you will believe me!" exclaimed Victoria with the most animated emphasis;—when suddenly recollecting her imprudence, she became red and pale alternately; her whole frame trembled; and faint and confused her head sunk upon the elbow of the couch.

Sebastian, looking earnestly at her, "Good heavens!" he cried, "you are ill, my child."

"I am indeed," she falteringly said, quite subdued by the painful idea of having, per-

haps, by her unpardonable inadvertence betrayed the stranger, and exposed him to that danger he had warned her not to lead him into. "I am indeed, signior; I scarcely know what I have been saying for some minutes past, but believe I have been talking very incoherently."

Sebastian, in alarm, led her to a seat in the piazza. "What can I get for your relief, my dear child?" said he tenderly.

"Not any thing, thank you, signior; the air has already recovered me." And she was quite well; for as Sebastian took no notice of what her thoughtless words implied, her agonising fears for the safety of her new-found friend subsided, and with them her indisposition. Sebastian, seating himself by her, restored the picture without further comment; and after some moments passed in unimportant questions and answers, Victoria asked Sebastian if he knew how Hero had disposed of herself since breakfast?

"When taking my morning walk," he replied, "I beheld that deluded wretch where in my years of captivity here I have never been allowed to go. I saw Alonzo

leading her round the ramparts:—'tis true she was clad in the castle uniform; but her manner, so ill according with her masculine attire, betrayed her instantly to me; and Alonzo may have cause to tremble for his temerity, if her disguise concealed her not from the penetrating Diego; who would, I am certain, rejoice in any circumstance that could discover to Don Manuel the unworthiness of Alonzo, and lessen him in his growing favour."

"Is it not strange, signior, that Diego, who has yielded himself so implicitly to the guidance of vice, by his uniform obedience to Don Manuel, should still possess sufficient virtue to condemn the enormities of Alonzo?"

"It is certainly singular, my child: but, paradoxical as Diego may appear, he is by no means an uncommon character; while the motives which actuate his conduct are difficult to define. He is not the first instance, by numbers, which has come to our knowledge, of virtue and villany combined; since even the most consummate villains have been sometimes known to give signal proofs

of some particular virtue. Diego considers, from long habit, blood-shedding and rapine no crimes; while I know he would shrink with horror from the idea of betraying those who repose a confidence in his honour; and the wealth of the universe, I am persuaded, could not tempt him from his faith to his master. Yet I foresee, ere long, some dormant virtue, added to private enmity, will lead him to what gold could not win him to."

"The horde of wretches who pollute this castle have, for years, been bound together by their mutual interest; and as we see the greatest empires rise, flourish, and decline, so shall we one day witness the fall of this iniquitous commonwealth. Men devoid of principle cannot long live together without their natural propensity to evil leading them to injure each other as well as the world at large. The public good may for a time stifle the embers of private resentment; but fresh fuel adding daily to combustible matter, a flame will at length break out to consume all it meets with. The seeds of discord have been long, long sown amongst this vile com-

munity, which art has hitherto most carefully concealed; and now the envenomed plants which have sprung from the deadly soil and seeds of villany, hatred, and revenge, are bursting daily from concealment. Animosity is now at work; and ere long individual mining for the destruction of individual will bring on a general ruin; and should Providence permit us to survive that moment of horror, we may yet be restored to the blessings of liberty and honourable society."

The sound of approaching footsteps prevented the further progress of this conversation. Hero, just emerged from her toilet, advanced towards them, and without the incumbrance of respect or ceremony threw herself into a seat by Victoria. Neither herself nor her insolent and affected airs, which were as conspicuous as some very costly jewels which were disposed of to the best advantage amongst her drapery, were honoured by the smallest notice from Victoria or Sebastian, who both appeared to be deeply engaged in a conversation upon the fine arts—a conversation the weak and mis-

guided Hero could not bear a part in, or even understand.

At length Hippolyto announced dinner; and Victoria was so happy at seeing this her humble friend returned in safety, that her ardent feelings could not be suppressed; and no inconsiderable share of pleasure she conveyed to his bosom, when she sweetly told him how much his absence had alarmed, how much his return in safety now rejoiced her.

CHAP. IV.

Alonzo was already in the parlour; and dinner passed on in uninteresting dialogue, and without any incident worth relating. Very soon after the cloth was removed and the servants departed, Alonzo retired. Hero attempted not to follow him, but sat amusing herself by calling forth the silver sounds of a very fine repeating watch, richly adorned with gems, obviously a present from Alonzo to her. With horror and pity Victoria and Sebastian beheld the jewels as the price of this poor deluded wretch's integrity; and whilst she was employed in admiring the treasures vice had lavished on her, Victoria and Sebastian held an interesting conversation uninterrupted by her. At length Diego entered the room rather abruptly.

"Do you mean to walk this evening, donna?" said he, respectfully addressing himself to Victoria.

"Certainly she does," replied Hero with marked quickness.

Diego, answering Hero only by a contemptuous glance, repeated his question to Victoria with increased respect.

"I should certainly like to walk, if you do not think the air too keen this evening for me, as I seem already to have got a little cold."

"I have been out, donna, and can assure you the evening is so mild, that, if you wrap yourself up warm, a walk would be rather of service to you. Signior Sebastian will, I suppose, have the pleasure of accompanying you; and I will have the honour to attend with a cloak, that, should necessity require it, *shall guard you from every danger that may be in the wind.*"

There was so much of impressive particularity in Diego's manner, that Victoria instantly agreed to walk.

"Or perhaps, donna, instead of walking, you may prefer visiting our observatory, which is situated in a part of the grounds you have not yet been in. For particular reasons it has for a length of time been shut up from

the inspection of every one. In it is a remarkable fine orrery, and many things worthy your attention, and which I doubt not signior Sebastian will have great pleasure in showing to you."

"What, Diego!" said Sebastian in a tone of much surprise, "and dare you venture to admit us?"

"Yes, signior; and I would dare to do much more for lady Victoria: besides, my orders extend only to the exclusion of those who, by a too great intercourse with the heavenly bodies, might be influenced to break their fealty with our community; and as you, signior, and lady Victoria, I may suppose, feel no inclination to become members of our society, your studying astromomy cannot affect our interest."

"It would be a high gratification to me to go there," said Victoria, "although my knowledge in the science is not very profound."

"Then we will go, my child, since Diego is so good to admit us," replied Sebastian.

"Signior," said Diego, "you had better allow Hippolyto to attend you, as you may

require assistance: and he knows something of the matter, I believe; for, if I recollect aright, you instructed him with——" Diego suddenly ceased; and, to conceal his fast-rising emotions, bowed respectfully, and hastily quitted the room.

Victoria, knowing the cause of Diego's agitation, was sensibly affected by his manner, and trembled for her venerable friend; who instantly retreated into the library, where Victoria attempted not to follow him, concluding he wished to indulge his feelings unobserved. At length he returned, calm and collected; and taking no notice of his little absence, he fell into conversation with Victoria apart from Hero; and amongst other things he explained the mystery which had appeared in his and Diego's expressions relative to the observatory, which in short was occasioned by the following circumstance.

About six years prior to this period, a wonderfully fine orrery, with a number of astronomical instruments, fell, among other spoils (upon a piratical expedition), into the hands of Don Manuel; and the observatory

belonging to the castle, which for many years had been falling to decay, was put into complete repair for the reception of these treasures. Sebastian was requested to arrange all the instruments and machinery; and in this undertaking he was assisted by a man of a remarkably mechanic turn, named Lazarillo, who, next to Garcias, was Don Manuel's prime friend and favourite—an infidel, of manners profligate, of a spirit bold and daring; in short, in every evil propensity an epitome of Garcias at least, if not his counterpart.

In the arrangement of this machinery Lazarillo was often induced to ask Sebastian many questions relative to the science these instruments were made for, the answers to which led him on to wish for more information: and when the whole was completed, and that Sebastian displayed to him the wonderful purposes of the whole, he became charmed with the science, and panted for that knowledge in it which the philanthropy of Sebastian soon put him in the method of obtaining. The more he knew, the more Lazarillo became enamoured of

the study; he devoted all his leisure hours to it; and soon, from contemplating such glorious works of the creation, he was insensibly led to the Creator himself. He could no longer doubt—he looked back upon his life—he trembled—and fled from the castle and his crimes. The most diligent search was made after him by the emissaries of Don Manuel, but to no purpose; he was not found. Lazarillo had taken refuge in a monastery in France; and soon after devoted himself to the silent austerities of the order of Le Trappe, that he might never be tempted to betray Don Manuel, who had been his friend—that he might for ever uninterruptedly contemplate the horrors of his past life, and teach his heart that penitence and virtue which he now believed essential to his ultimate happiness.

From this period the observatory was shut up, and the keys consigned to Diego, with a strict charge not to allow the adherents of Don Manuel to enter it for the study of a science so destructive to atheism.

At length Diego appeared, attended by Hippolyto and Thomas (the English seaman

mentioned by Teresa in her narrative), and they all immediately set out upon their expedition; when to Victoria's surprise, she saw the three attendants were armed with carabines.

On entering the grounds, they turned into a walk where Victoria had never before been; on which moment Hero left them—not unobserved, but no one thought it necessary to detain her; and the instant of her departure, Diego hastened to excuse his urging Victoria to walk, by giving her his reasons for it.

"Teresa informed me," said he, "that she had just seen Hero cautiously commit a large bundle into the hands of Carlos, Alonzo's servant and most devoted creature; and about an hour since, Thomas brought me intelligence of Alonzo's having liberated four men who had long been in confinement under suspicion of disaffection; and that they, with some more who have lately evinced symptoms of infidelity, were all last night busily employed in refitting a brigantine that has

lain in one of the creeks for a length of time unused.

"Soon after I heard this, Carlos entered the kitchen, and carelessly inquired if signior Sebastian had yet retired to his apartments. I had now learned enough to awaken my suspicions of him; and his manner now only confirmed my apprehensions. My presence, I saw, restrained those questions he wished to ask, and I to hear: I therefore left the kitchen, and concealed myself where I overheard all that passed. He told Teresa, that his anxiety to see the beautiful captive lady was so great, he would esteem it a most particular favour if she would find out for him if the donna meant to walk this evening, and where, that he might obtain a sight of her. Teresa promising to comply with his request, he departed, in such evident exultation, that my suspicions were converted into conviction of meditated treachery; and I therefore wished lady Victoria to walk out, thus attended, to show Alonzo that he is suspected: and being so complete a dastard, he will certainly give up a project that he

finds cannot be accomplished without that kind of contention he is most averse to."

Victoria made her most grateful acknowledgments to Diego; and Sebastian pleased and flattered him not a little, by approving of all he had done.

Upon reaching the observatory, Diego and Thomas stationed themselves at the door, to exclude unwelcome intruders; while Sebastian, Victoria, and Hippolyto, entered the building; where Sebastian soon evinced his very superior knowledge in astronomy; but, shortly complaining of fatigue, bade Hippolyto supply his place, who came forward with that becoming degree of modesty ever attendant on real merit; and, in despite of her fears and sorrows, he charmed Victoria by his graceful unassuming manner of disclosing his most profound scientific information; and chased her griefs for a time, by the entertainment his explanations and observations afforded.

Victoria became, every new interview, more and more interested in the fortunes of this young man. There was a distinguished grace and elegance, as well as propriety

in his language and deportment, a fascination in his manners, she had never seen equalled, except in the stranger she had that morning encountered. Much and anxiously she wished to know Hippolyto's history; to learn why a gentleman (for such his every sentiment and gesture proclaimed him, and such Alonzo acknowledged him to be), and of such striking natural and acquired perfections, should submit to the degradation of being a domestic to Don Manuel, without even seeming to repine at his fallen and lost condition. But the embarrassment she had before brought herself into with Alonzo upon the same subject now taught her caution, and prudence restrained all inquiry.

They remained in the observatory until the approach of twilight reminded them to return; and during their walk homeward they at different times observed some straggling men, who seemed as scouts sent to reconnoitre. But Victoria and her party arrived at the castle unmolested; as Diego and Thomas, by way of dispersing some birds of prey, made the rocks and woods resound with the reports of their carabines.

When they entered the castle, Diego hastened to secure the doors and windows. "We must exert ourselves," said he, "to provide for the safety of lady Victoria until bed-time. After she retires to her chamber she may defy the machinations of Alonzo, and all the scoundrels he has at his command."

Victoria proposed withdrawing immediately, to save her friends the trouble of guarding her. But none of them agreeing to that proposition, it was determined that Sebastian should remain in the parlour with her, while Hippolyto and Thomas should keep guard in the library: and when domestic business did not require Diego's presence elsewhere, he was to join their watch.

In a short time after the commencement of her *tête-à-tête* with Sebastian, Victoria took up a lute, with a view of amusing her companion, as he had the goodness to give up his own pursuits to stay and protect her: and after playing a few sweetly simple airs, Sebastian entreated her to sing: and anxious to oblige him, she instantly complied, with such thrilling melody and expression, such fascinating pathos, that poor Thomas soon found him-

self unable to restrain his feelings; and suddenly he presented himself before the bewitching warbler, with large tears streaming down his furrowed sun-burnt cheeks.

"O miss! miss!" cried he, in an almost unintelligible jargon of bad Spanish, broken French, and complete sentences from his English sea vocabulary, "be not angry with a body, since you your ownself baled up these briny drops from the bottom of my heart. I never anchored within ear-shot of such sweet music since that dear youth, who steered my shattered hulk out of the whirlpool of Garcias's vengeance, was himself wrecked on the same accursed shoal, and hoisted up to heaven. That, that there lute was his, dear heart! and your notes have blown him so fresh into my mind, and have sent such a broadside of grief into my heart, where his memory is fast moored, that you have made a very land-lubber of me, and have heaved the tide of sorrow from my eyes. Oh! that he were living, to be your champion! By St. George and old England, he would defend you!—But, alas! alas! he is cold in an untimely grave! and the villains are yet afloat

who robbed the world of the finest pearl of the ocean, and——"

Hippolyto now appearing, mildly stopped the volubility of Thomas's genuine grief, and gently drew him into the library; when the poor fellow fell upon the neck of Hippolyto, and wept aloud. Sebastian was sensibly affected; and Victoria shed almost as many tears as the artless tar.

At length, Hero and Alonzo demanded admittance at the glass door from the piazza; and as Sebastian saw they were alone, he let them in.

"Upon my word, signior," said Alonzo with a sneer, as he entered, "you were willing, I see, to secure your *tête-à-tête* from the possibility of interruption. Pray, may I ask what you feared?"

"We have no fears," replied Sebastian with stern emphasis. "We are aware of the treachery of a rascal, and are prepared to oppose his villany."

Alonzo, although evidently disconcerted, attempted no reply—but, throwing himself in affected negligence into a chair, yawned, stretched his limbs, complained of fatigue

and drowsiness, and murmured at being compelled to rise at the dawn of the succeeding morning to execute some business for Don Manuel.

Shortly after, supper was served; and Alonzo devoured his with voracious avidity, drank in proportion, nor once suffered those common forms of politeness which he had ever been anxious to evince himself completely master of, once to call his attention from his greedy employment, until he finished his substantial repast; which, he said, must sustain him for many hours, as he was going where food could not be obtained—hinted, that the business he had to perform for Don Manuel was intricate and dangerous in the extreme: and when the attendants were departing after supper, he ordered Juan to call him at the first dawn of morning.

At the usual hour Teresa and Diego appeared to conduct Victoria to her chamber. Instantly Alonzo, who had been for some time apparently struggling to suppress an overpowering drowsiness, snatched up a light, respectfully bade Victoria and Sebastian good night, took Hero's hand, which he pressed

to his lips, elaborately expatiated upon the agony of parting, deplored most piteously the torments he should endure until they met again, and then departed.

"Diego," said Sebastian, "do you really think I may now venture to leave my precious charge?"

"Safely you may, signior; since we have every reason to believe," replied Diego, "that the project, whatever it is, is postponed till to-morrow evening. But in the morning, and you may tell him so, most worthy Hero, I shall convey to Don Manuel the unexpected intelligence of the baseness of this his favourite minion; and if he is not effectually disgraced, and his powers for mischief demolished, by Heaven, I think I will prove false too, and barter my fidelity for internal peace!"

Sebastian now bidding an affectionate adieu to Victoria, and bestowing his farewell benediction upon her, they separated.

CHAP. V.

VICTORIA, attended by Hero, Teresa, and Diego, unmolested, reached her chamber-door; but when Diego attempted to unlock it, he found the key resisted all his efforts to turn it. It was now but too evident that some violence had been used to injure the lock, and Diego in alarm instantly resolved to take it off and place another upon the door. The implements necessary to effect all this were in his own, the very next, chamber; and having no idea of any immediate danger to apprehend, he unhesitatingly entered his room, to get what he wanted, leaving the door wide open to shew light to Victoria and her companions whilst they waited for him.

But the instant Diego entered his chamber, the door of it closed with violence, as if directed by some invisible power; and as the lock could only be opened by the key,

which unfortunately was upon the outside, vain was every effort the alarmed and astonished Diego made to get it open.

In the moment Diego's door closed, another opposite to it opened; and a man of gigantic stature, and ghastly aspect, made his appearance, enveloped in blue flames, that reflected more hideously his grim and horrid visage. The moment Teresa beheld the figure she shrieked and fell senseless on the floor, while Victoria, whose heart shuddered with apprehension of mortal foes, beheld this appearance as nothing supernatural; and although she trembled, her mind was firm, her senses all collected, and ready to perform their function.

The spectre fixing his eyes, which seemed rolling in fire, upon Victoria, motioned for her to follow him in silence.

"No," she exclaimed, "I will not follow you. This device is too puerile to deceive me." Then swift as lightning she darted to Diego's door; and was hastening to liberate him when she was seized by a man who came from she knew not where. Vehemently and piteously she now called upon Sebas-

tian, Diego, and Hippolyto. Several men with lights suddenly appeared; and the wretch who held her was bearing her towards the stairs, in defiance of her shrieks and struggles, when his progress was unexpectedly arrested by strength he found invincible.

Instantly Victoria found herself released from the ruffian's grasp, and her waist encircled by Hippolyto's left arm; whilst with his right he disarmed three or four of the villains who attacked him, and parried off several deadly blows which were aimed to deprive Victoria of her gallant champion. Thomas now fought his way to Hippolyto's assistance. No one attacked either with impunity: but Hippolyto's fears, lest his lovely charge should sustain any injury from the cutlasses that were clashing around her head, made him act chiefly upon the defensive. At length his sword was shivered to pieces by a blow from the butt end of a carabine. This the spectre, who had hitherto remained inactive, instantly observing, drew a massy sword, and darted towards the now unarmed Hippolyto with an intention to cut

him down; when Victoria, recollecting in this moment of despair the pistol which Diego had given her, drew it with precipitance from her girdle, and put it into the hand of Hippolyto. He instantly lodged the contents of it in the side of the assassin, who, with a dreadful yell, fell to the ground weltering in blood.

By this time the desperate and enraged Diego had broke open his own door; and, ever armed with sword and pistols, he entered, ready prepared for battle, the field of action at this critical juncture; vivid fury flashing from her eyes, and stern vengeance pourtrayed in every line of his agitated countenance, determined upon the destruction of all who should oppose him in his rescue of Victoria: and now, in a few moments more, not a foe remained unsubdued who had dared to remain and meet the fury of our heroine's defenders.

Sebastian, alarmed by the tumult of the retreating ruffians, seizing a sword, flew to the scene of action, and arrived just in the moment of victory.

"Where, where is the lady Victoria?"

exclaimed this dreadfully agitated, but firmly intrepid man.

"She is here, signior," replied Diego, "safe and unhurt, thanks to the gallant Hippolyto."

"Gallant!" cried Thomas exultingly; "d—n my eyes but he fought like a British admiral; sunk, burnt, and destroyed the besieger's squadron; forced the enemy to sheer off. Bravely he defended the precious fort, where gratitude is now at high water, come in an overflow from the heart of the citadel."

Victoria had attempted to speak her thanks to her brave deliverers; but her gratitude was too powerful for utterance, and tears were her eloquent language of acknowledgment. Hippolyto still supported her, for she was unable to sustain herself. Her courage was of delicate texture, not formed for much service. It had worn itself out in the animated exertions it had made; and, unequal to further contest, it now left her languid and exhausted. Sebastian anxiously approached her, and with parental tenderness pressed her hand to his heart in token

of sympathy and congratulation. This was another attack upon Victoria's susceptibility, and her trickling tears flowed still faster.

"Avast! avast now, miss!" cried Thomas, quite affected by her tears; "what argufies piping all hands to those pretty peepers? and all what for? Why, there has not one head, or even arm or leg, been lost in your defence now!"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Sebastian, "you are wounded, my brave fellow! your hand bleeds!"

"Wounded, repeated Thomas contemptuously, "that's a good one. Why, tis only a bit of a rent in my flesh from a cutlass, which the doctor will darn in a minute for me, bless you!"

Victoria's humanity now roused her spirits once more into action: she broke from Hippolyto and Sebastian, and bound her handkerchief round Thomas's hand.

"Something should instantly be done for these our fallen foes," said Hippolyto compassionately.

"Certainly," replied Diego. "Juan, sum-

mon Pedro immediately. But who or what ghastly figure is this, extended apparently lifeless here?"

"That," cried Thomas, "is the enemy's high admiral, Don Alonzo Spectreato Ninnyhammero Cowardillo."

"Alonzo!" exclaimed Hippolyto, "I hope I have not sent him, loaded as he is with crimes, into the presence of his Creator." Then hastily he disencumbered the phantom from his hideous disguise, and found beneath it Alonzo alive; though his wound bled much, and fear of dying was almost depriving him of existence.

Thomas now looking around among the fallen enemy, suddenly ejaculated in a tone of sorrow and dismay, "Split the mizen if the Teresa has not foundered in a gale, and the only soul on board perished!"

Hippolyto, who was striving to staunch the blood which flowed from Alonzo's side, now with Victoria flew to assist Teresa, who still was in a swoon. Hippolyto raised the poor old woman in his arms, and bore her to Diego's bed. Victoria had some salts in her pocket, and found a jug of water in the

room; both of which proved efficacious to Teresa, who revived just as Pedro made his appearance.

Alonzo was moved to a bed-in that room from whence, in his ghostship, he had made his grand entry, and where Hero had taken refuge in the commencement of the tumult.

Upon Pedro's examination of Alonzo's wound, he pronounced it not mortal;—intelligence that Alonzo no sooner heard, than his coward soul, relieved from the terrors of death, ceased to tremble, and re-assumed its insolence and self-importance of authority. Loudly and vindictively he now complained of the outrage offered to him while executing the commands of Don Manuel.

"You are a liar, as well as a coward and a scoundrel," exclaimed Diego with vehemence: "you were executing the commands of your own vile deceitful heart. Don Manuel had nothing to do with it."

Sebastian and Pedro, with much difficulty, persuaded Diego to silence, fearing he should, by irritating Alonzo, bring on a degree of fever that might prove inimical to his wound; when Diego, finding that he would not be

allowed to give his indignation free scope, retired muttering, to break open Victoria's chamber-door, and to secure for her a safe asylum for the night.

Alonzo now vehemently called for his creature Carlos, the man who had attempted to carry Victoria off, and who had escaped unhurt. Carlos no sooner appeared than Alonzo ordered him to summon Gonzalvo the keeper of the dungeons, with fetters, immediately to him.

"For what purpose may I ask, signior?" said Sebastian.

"To imprison those miscreants, Hippolyto and Thomas, for mutiny. They attempted the life of their officer."

"True," replied Sebastian; "but that officer was a traitor to the state he served."

"That is a base and cruel insinuation, signior; I can prove I was doing my duty. I have power to imprison those caitiffs, and by Heaven I'll do it!"

"You certainly have the power to imprison, but not to injure them, you will find, signior."

"I have that power," exclaimed Alonzo,

in a rage; "and d—n me but I'll pursue them with my vengeance to the gates of hell!"

"A dangerous pursuit for so attractive a signior," replied Sebastian, coolly walking off with Pedro, who now went to the relief of the other wounded men.

At length Gonzalvo arrived, and received his orders from Alonzo. Immediately he hastened to execute them: and Victoria, who was still in Diego's chamber bestowing her humane attentions upon Teresa, no sooner beheld this horror-inspiring ruffian, with three attendants, grim and ferine-looking as himself, all bearing fetters in their hands, clinking direfully as they stalked along, than her soul was harrowed by half anticipated apprehensions of the horrid fact. Wildly she started from Teresa's side, and meeting Gonzalvo before Hippolyto or Thomas observed his entrance, half shrieking, half inarticulately, demanded his business there; which, without the incumbrance of ceremony, he plainly communicated.

Victoria sunk instantly upon her knees, and with uplifted hands, and streaming eyes,

began to implore mercy for her gallant deliverers, when Hippolyto suddenly raised her from the ground.

"Oh, spare me, spare me," he exclaimed, "the maddening torture of seeing you thus humbling yourself to wretches such as these!"

Gonzalvo and his men with difficulty tore Hippolyto from supporting Victoria, who instantly sunk on the floor. Vain was now every effort to restrain Hippolyto: he flung the blood-hounds with violence from him; again raised Victoria from the ground, and supported her until Sebastian entered, to whose care he instantly resigned her; and then with mildness and striking dignity gave himself into the hands of Gonzalvo, who immediately fettered him with the heaviest set of irons he had there, while Victoria, in all the anguish of grief and terror, still implored the unfeeling wretches to have mercy upon her brave deliverers.

Hippolyto spoke not; but his intelligent countenance expressed grief, awakened by her distress, too great for utterance.

"Be not thus alarmed, my sweet suscep-

tible child," said Sebastian: "no danger awaits your deliverers: Alonzo's authority extends not to life."

"But his treachery may, signior," she sobbed out; "and, oh! if you knew what agony I feel from apprehension for their safety, you would supplicate too in their behalf."

"Let me entreat you to be comforted, lady Victoria," Hippolyto at length articulated: "believe me, no danger awaits us. We must, tis true, submit for a time to wear these fetters; but the only pangs we shall endure in our confinement will arise from our being deprived of the power of protecting you from the machinations of villany."

"Come, be of good cheer, miss," cried Thomas, winking to conceal a tear her distress had drawn into his eyes: "after our trip to the port of limbo we shall soon steer back to cruise in the channel to protect you. Good-bye, miss! for, d'ye see, we have received sailing orders, and must be getting under weigh."

Gonzalvo moved on with his prisoners.

"Stop," said Sebastian with a determined voice and commanding air; "learn, Gonzalvo, that Hippolyto is still protected by Francisco." Gonzalvo seemed petrified, and Sebastian continued:—"You must, I know, obey Alonzo's orders by taking him to prison; but take care of the treatment he receives there. Beware of Alonzo's treachery. Tremble at Francisco's vengeance."

Hippolyto's bonds were instantly knocked off, and Thomas's exchanged for a lighter set. Victoria felt as if her heart had been released too from fetters, and the glow of hope began to warm her bosom. Diego just then entered, to inform her that her chamber was ready for her reception; when he kindly offered to allow Teresa to remain with her during the night, should she consider her presence any comfort.

As it can readily be imagined, Victoria thankfully accepted Diego's humane proposal, and with him and Teresa went to her room, at the moment Gonzalvo departed with his prisoners, attended by Sebastian, who promised to see Victoria again before he retired for the night.

Sebastian's accompanying Hippolyto and Thomas to their prison was a great source of comfort to Victoria, as she doubted not his having every thing arranged with all possible convenience for them; and her apprehensions for their safety had considerably subsided since she beheld the wonderful effect the knowledge of Francisco's still protecting Hippolyto had upon the keeper of the dungeons.

CHAP. VI.

As soon as they entered Victoria's chamber, Diego fast locked the door, and drew a couple of iron bolts across it; then, after placing our heroine in an elbow chair, and Teresa in another, he retired to a respectful distance.

"I must take the liberty, Donna Victoria," said he, "of remaining here until signior Sebastian's return, when I shall go for some wine to recruit your and poor Teresa's spirits."

"You are very considerate and very kind, Diego," replied our heroine. "Indeed I feel almost subdued by gratitude for all the great and uncommon acts of humanity I have just experienced. But how happens it, my good Diego, that I have the happiness to find you have escaped the vengeance of Alonzo, which surely your gallant defence of me exposed you to, at least equally with my other brave though unfortunate deliverers?"

"Possibly it might, donna; but Alonzo will not openly avow it, since it is the rule with cowards only to attack the weak. I possess too much influence in this castle for dastard dogs like him to fly at me."

"I understood, I believed," said Victoria in a tone of anxious alarm, "that Hippolyto was protected by some man in power here—by Francisco?"

"And so he is, donna; but Alonzo knows it not: he conceives Hippolyto to be a fallen favourite, from the circumstance of Francisco's allowing him to become Don Manuel's domestic; nor shall he be undeceived until he has brought Francisco's wrath upon him, which will insure to us ample vengeance."

"But will not that endanger the life of Hippolyto in the intermediate time?" said Victoria apprehensively.

"Oh, no, donna; since Gonzalvo shall know Hippolyto is still as highly estimated by Francisco as when, deeply interested for his fate, he begged him from Don Manuel, and had him reared and educated with the noble ever to be lamented Theodore."

"Still highly estimated by Francisco! Oh! Diego, can you believe that? Can he estimate the noble-minded, highly-educated Hippolyto, and place him here as a domestic, amenable to that miscreant Alonzo?"

"I certainly cannot account for that, donna; but, being unaccountable, it is more like the proceedings of Francisco, whose whole life is mystery. His conduct to the dear youth I just have mentioned, to the inestimable Theodore, can never be accounted for—can never, never be forgiven by me. After rearing him with so much care; after seeming to adore him with paternal fondness, even in its tenderest shape; to let him fall, all perfect and lovely as he was, a victim to the vengeance of a vindictive villain." Teresa sobbed convulsively. "Pardon me, Teresa," continued he, "for thus distressing you. I fell upon the subject unconsciously: tis one I carefully avoid; for even to think one moment of it makes me wretched for days, and I am ready to curse the hour in which I fell into Don Manuel's hands."

A melancholy pause ensued, which at length was broken by Victoria, who sympa-

thising in and pitying the evident affliction of Diego and Teresa, wished to give their thoughts a different turn.

"You fell into Don Manuel's hands, you say, Diego? Indeed I could scarcely think that you had entered his service voluntarily."

"Voluntarily! No, Heaven forbid! Perhaps, donna, if you knew my little story you would not consider me quite so abandoned."

"Abandoned! Believe me, Diego, I have no such idea. Your conduct to me has surely evinced that yours is far, very far, from an unamiable heart."

"Nature did not make it a bad one, I may venture to affirm: but if you will condescend to listen to my short history, donna, you shall judge how far example has corrupted it."

"My father and mother, donna, by birth Italians, were favourite and confidential domestics in the family of a very distinguished Tuscan nobleman, who had married the heiress of one of the highest of the Spanish hidalgo. This lady had the goodness to be

my godmother, and had me named Diego, after some one of her own family. I was nursed near the castle of my lord, and as I advanced in childhood, was often taken by my parents to the castle to divert the young heir; who, although several years older than me, at length became so fond of me that he had me to reside entirely with him at the castle, where I well remember I was innocent and happy. Every one was kind to me, because I was my young lord's favourite. I was grateful to all: but my young lord I loved with the tenderest affection—an affection that years since past in a busy, turbulent, and I am grieved to add, vicious life, have not been able to eradicate. My amiable young patron was adorned with the most striking graces both of mind and form; and being of a remarkably studious turn, he had the goodness to undertake the task of my education, condescendingly styling himself my tutor, and me his pupil, who was the most devoted of his servants; and all that my dear respected tutor taught me I learned with more facility, and was more indelibly impressed upon my memory, than what any

other instructor ever taught me. Oh! well, well do I remember every circumstance of those short-lived days of my happiness. Alas! for me they were not doomed to continue.

"When I attained my twelfth year, calamitously for me, an account arrived of my lady's father being at the point of death; and the afflicted family almost instantly set out for this country, attended among other domestics by my parents; but I, alas! was left behind in the particular care of the housekeeper, who had hitherto evinced the strongest partiality towards me. Well, well do I remember my parting interview with my young lord, my beloved master! Oh! what sweet advice he threw away upon me! how affectionately did he regret his not having it in his power to take me with him! He gave me a heavy purse to buy books and playthings to make me comfortable during his absence; embraced me tenderly, and followed his parents into the carriage that bore him from my sight for ever. I thought my heart would burst at that moment. It was my final separation from innocence and peace. I fell to the ground; and, oh! what scalding

tears of bitter anguish did I shed?" Diego, now overcome by the recollection of past scenes, was for some minutes unable to proceed. Victoria, much interested and affected, consoled him with some kindly sympathising expressions, and he at length continued:

"You will, I am sure, madam, have the goodness to excuse these effusions of my feelings at the remembrance of scenes I have for some years past endeavoured to chase from my mind, but which, in spite of every effort, have for these many days continually recurred. For some hours, donna, I lay upon the ground weeping piteously. At length I was summoned to dinner by the housekeeper, who now was an altered being in her conduct towards me. My heart was too full of grief to allow me to partake of food: this late indulgent woman was now enraged at my stubbornness, as she termed it; said my tears proceeded from anger at my lord's not taking me to Spain; and that my want of appetite arose from pride, which led me to scorn food at any table but my lord's. Several days passed on, my grief continuing, and her ill-humour and unkindness hourly increasing.

"I was naturally proud, donna; I could not bear to be thought meanly of: I considered my grief as laudable, and I could not brook its being misinterpreted. I clearly saw the housekeeper had conceived a very contemptible opinion of me, and I hated her in return: and having a very high and enterprising spirit, I resolved one night, when sorrow kept me waking, to leave her. Accordingly next morning, at an early hour, I stole out of the castle, and made the best of my way to the son of one of the park-keepers, a lad of about fifteen, to whom I imparted my sorrows, showed him my purse, which I promised to give him if he would contrive to have me conveyed to my young lord in Old Castile. He readily undertook the matter, and desired me to call upon him again in the evening; which I did; when to my infinite joy he informed me, that he and his father had settled every thing for me with a carrier, who was to set out that very night for Pisa, who would take charge of me to that place, where he would put me on board some vessel bound to Tarragona, from whence I could be easily conveyed to my young lord.

"To be brief, donna, I escaped from the castle, and poor dupe! gave my purse to my perfidious confidant. I accompanied the carrier to Pisa, who, according to promise, immediately put me on board a ship which he informed me was bound to Tarragona. Unbounded was my joy in the idea of soon being in the presence of my beloved young lord; nor did the fear of my old lord's or my parents' displeasure, at my unbidden appearance, ever once obtrude upon my childish imagination. But, alas! my dream of expected happiness soon vanished: I was awakened to present misery; for I was not long on board until I experienced treatment I had ever been unaccustomed to. The housekeeper's conduct was the extreme of kindness and indulgence when compared to it. I was ordered to hard labour, which, from being unused to, I was unable to execute: harsh treatment ensued, and my proud spirit became refractory: the consequence was my being cruelly chastised, put in heavy irons, and imprisoned in the hold, with mouldy biscuits and sea-water for my only food, and daily correction for my pastime.

"How long I continued in this miserable situation I can by no means decide; it must have been many weeks, but they seemed ages to me. At length one day I heard a most uncommon bustle on board, with a loud and continued firing. In the general confusion my prison was opened, and, eager to learn what was the matter, I scrambled upon deck even with my irons on, where for the first time I beheld a sea engagement. For some moments I felt alarm, and the noise of the guns terrified me extremely; but by degrees I became not only reconciled to but fond of the business. By entreaties I had my fetters knocked off, and soon I was to be found in the thickest part of the action.

"But, desperately as our people fought, we soon were overpowered, and became slaves to a corsair of Algiers. I will not trespass upon your time, nor wound your feeling heart, donna, by relating all the misery which I endured through a three years bondage to Achmet, my new master. I was not, like many of my fellow sufferers, taken to Algiers, and sold to the highest bidder. Achmet chose to retain me in his own service,

whilst from his brutality I experienced every species of cruelty.

"In this school I learned nothing but a familiarity with scenes of carnage and barbarity, and saw no traces whatever of religion, but in the derision the few Christians among us bestowed upon the pagan rites; whilst I was taught indifference, almost amounting to apathy, relative to all my own actions, by receiving the bastinado, or some refinement upon cruelty more dreadful, whenever the caprice of my tyrant sentenced me to punishment, even when I had committed no offence.

"At length, donna, we fell in with and were taken by a Spanish pirate of superior force. The whole crew of the corsair were, without any distinction of persons, stowed together in the hold. The barbarian Achmet had hitherto been the object of my firm hatred; but now he was a fallen foe, and past injuries and enmity fled from my remembrance. The purveyor who daily distributed our food gave to the Christian captives a full allowance, but to the infidels only half. Achmet, who had a most voracious appetite,

suffered terribly from this circumstance; and all whom he had ill treated, except myself and Thomas, the English mariner, whom you saw this evening, and who was then my fellow captive, added insult to his sufferings. I divided my portion of food equally with Achmet; and Thomas gave him one third of his.

"I mention not this incident to assume praise to myself, but to gain it for Don Manuel, into whose power we had fallen. This circumstance found its way to Don Manuel's ear; and, strange as it may appear to you, donna, that any trait of virtue should touch his heart, this little matter interested and affected him. Thomas's fetters and mine were, at his command, instantly knocked off: we were brought into his presence; he warmly applauded our conduct, classed us among his own immediate people, and has treated us with distinguished confidence and regard.

"From that period, donna, I have continued in the service, and, as I have just informed you, in the confidence, of Don Manuel. You will not, therefore, condemn me for omitting many subsequent events in my

life, which would be a breach of faith in me to disclose. To Don Manuel I owe the most lively gratitude: he rescued me from a most dreadful captivity; my young heart he won by kindness, and in my maturer years he has treated me with particular regard. Yet I still sighed after my parents, and my young lord; to gain any intelligence of them in my captivity, or for the first years of my residence here, was an impossibility; and latterly, had I not been bound by solemn oaths to secresy, I should not have dared to present a worthless wretch like me before them: better they should think me dead, than know me what I am!

"You will have the candour to remember, donna, how very a youth I was when I entered this castle, with a mind long habituated to behold scenes of wickedness and cruelty. The young sapling may be trained to any form—and from the moment I left Tuscany, to the present hour, I associated with none but those who by example and precept gave me lessons of vice; which, in the ardour of misjudging youth to prove my gratitude to my master, I too soon learned. I now had

none to guide me but those who led me on to vices my own heart never approved. I daily, I may say hourly, beheld nothing but monstrous enormities; and from long acquaintance with them, I at length ceased to start from them as crimes repugnant to my nature. Yet I must say, as something in mitigation of my offences, that I have never committed cool and deliberate murder. With sorrow and contrition I own I have deprived some of my fellow creatures of life: but it has been in attacks where I knew I should meet with resistance; and never during my existence did I raise my arm against that being who had not power to oppose me. I have never yet, in any instance, betrayed or deceived those who reposed a confidence in me; or persecuted or oppressed the innocent and feeble: but, to my shame, I have witnessed the commission of all those crimes without my endeavouring to prevent them; and have myself been accustomed to plunder without compunction, for these some years past; and have strove, with all my might, to shake off every recollection of the Deity whom I had been taught to adore in my

happy childhood, and which, in despite of every effort, has recurred to arrest me in my career of crimes; but then, fear of being thought a coward, or unfaithful to my master, still led me on to acts, my heart ever revolted from.

"How often has that dear lamented youth I have just been speaking of made me hesitate and tremble, by telling me of duties superior to those I owed Don Manuel! and I have no doubt, had his life been spared, he would have led me back to virtue, and to break my solemn oath of fealty to my master.

"I believe I was not formed to be a ruffian, since I am naturally fond of children. In the days of this youth's infancy I became attached to him, and rendered him many little acts of kindness, for which he ever evinced his gratitude. Often in his childhood has he climbed my knee, and pulled my ear close to his mouth, that he might whisper to me 'how dearly he should love me did I not live with, look like, and often act like, those horrid men about the castle, who made him tremble, they were so very naughty.'

Often have the artless rebukes of this innocent shook my very soul; and as he advanced in years, infinite were the pains he took to lead me back to virtue. Much has he talked to me of the Deity, of future rewards and punishments, of heaven and hell, until I little doubted the existence of such things; or else, why the difference between him and me, if both are doomed to share the same fate?—But, alas! he was taken to a better world; and, in despair, I plunged more deeply into that stream of perdition he had toiled so hard to save me from.

"Since you have been here, donna, I seem as if awakened from my pernicious infatuation; and those good ideas the dear lamented signior Theodore so anxiously strove to impress my mind with, I now hourly find, wanted only another bright example to give them force and call them into action. Your patient mildness, under your misfortunes, gave birth to better sensations in my mind than those it long had harboured. Whenever I beheld you, I thought of my dear young lord and my parents; and the days of my innocence and happiness recurred, not only

to torture but to soften my heart. From each new interview I have become more interested in your fate. Surrounded by innumerable dangers and horrors unparalleled, you had no support but in your mental strength, since we were all ruffians and strangers to you; and you had but too much reason to look upon us all with the eyes of fear and suspicion. I saw you felt your hapless situation with the fine and acute sensations of delicacy and sensibility; yet you bore it with the resignation of a Christian, who looked beyond this world for aid and happiness. I saw grief upon your brow; but patience and fortitude sat with it, as if placed there and inspired by your dependance upon the protection of the blessed Virgin, and those holy saints whose care I well remember my mother's teaching me to invoke in my days of happiness in the castle of Palino."

"The castle of Palino!!!" exclaimed Victoria, starting from her seat in evident amazement.

"Yes, donna, the castle of Palino, the principal residence of my respected lord conte——"

"Ariosto!" Victoria eagerly repeated.

Diego was in his turn astonished. "It was indeed, donna, the castle of conte Ariosto."

"Then know, Diego," she exclaimed, half breathless with trepidation, "then know, that Altidore, your beloved young lord, was my father!"

Diego attempted no reply. The pale hue of death instantly overspread his fine countenance—his eyes set, with a look of alarming insensibility—his bosom heaved with convulsive agitation—large drops of sweat gushed from his temples, and his jaw fell most frightfully; while his whole frame shook, and his knees smote each other with such violence, that Victoria expected him to fall to the ground without her possessing power to prevent him. Her alarm and pity for his situation were extreme, but she knew not how to relieve him. She held her salts to his nose, and eagerly entreated Teresa to assist her; but the poor old woman was so enervated by recent and present terror, that she could not afford the smallest service.

Luckily, in this moment of dilemma, Sebastian asked for admission; and Teresa, with some difficulty, contrived to let him in.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, upon beholding Diego, "what has occasioned this?"

"The poor soul has just found out, signior," replied Teresa, "that he knew and owed great obligations to the donna's father; and joy and surprise, I fear, will kill him."

Sebastian had brought a flask of wine, and hartshorn, with him; he instantly laid Diego upon the floor, and with some difficulty contrived to make him swallow a small quantity of the wine; while Victoria and Teresa bathed his temples and the palms of his hands with hartshorn: but, notwithstanding every effort to restore him, Diego evinced no symptoms of returning respiration, until Victoria had bitterly lamented her precipitance. At length, his eyes moved in wild glances; and heavy sighs, bursting as it seemed from the bottom of his heart, gave indication of renovated sensibility. In a few mo-

ents more he raised himself upon his elbow, and looked with a stupid stare of vacuity around him.

"Thank Heaven my imprudence has not destroyed him!" Victoria joyfully exclaimed. "How are you now, my good Diego?"

The sound of Victoria's voice recalled at once his wandering recollection, and he turned his eyes with quickness on her.—"Oh! yes," cried he, with that eagerness and inequality of voice which fully proved he was not quite recovered—"Oh! yes! yes! yes! I see, indeed, you are my dear lord's child! Oh! how often have you brought him fresh to my remembrance! Just, just such a look as that he gave me at the fatal moment of our parting." Diego, now completely subdued by the poignancy of his feelings, sunk to the ground, and hiding his face in his mantle, wept abundantly.

Sebastian rejoiced at beholding his tears, since they promised relief to his agonised mind. At length Diego sobbed out—"Recollection of the past, and horror at the present, quite unman me. Oh! what a place is this for conte Ariosto's daughter! and I,

wretch, miscreant that I am! I, assisted in bringing you to this infernal castle!" Convulsive sobs and groans now almost choked him: in a few minutes more he spoke again. "If I remember right, the lady Victoria said, that my dear respected lord *was* her father. Alas! that *was* implies his being no more."

"Heaven," replied Victoria, while tears of filial affection chased each other down her cheeks, "Heaven deprived me of my ever to be lamented inestimable parents ere my years allowed my being sensible of their value."

"Do not weep, dear donna," said Diego in a tone of heartfelt sorrow.

"Not weep!" returned Victoria mournfully. "If your remembrance of my father has existed since your very childhood, Diego, it would indeed be strange if his daughter's did not so too; and to remember and not lament him would be surely impossible!"

Some large drops which rolled unbidden down Diego's cheeks proved that he thought so too.

Sebastian now considering it advisable to interrupt a conversation too affecting to Vic-

toria and Diego in the present agitated state of their minds, poured out some wine, which he persuaded Victoria to take: he gave some also to Teresa, and then made Diego finish the flask; after which he recommended his retiring to bed, as his spirits evidently required repose.

"I shall leave this chamber, signior," Diego replied, "but not to go to bed. I have now a new duty to perform." With some difficulty he arose, supported by the kind Sebastian, and approached Victoria, whom with a tremulous voice he respectfully addressed.

"Lady Victoria," said he, "may pass the remainder of this night free from apprehension, as I have taken, and shall continue to take, every measure to ensure her safety. By your bed side, donna, I have placed an alarm-bell, which will summon me on the instant to you should you have any fears. The trap-door I have most effectually secured; and all the fastenings of your chamber door I have removed to the inside, both for your comfort and safety. I shall now hasten to arm a guard to patrole this part of the castle for the

night; and to station a sentinel at your door; which sentinel shall be myself, as long as I have power to keep the post."

"Diego, I request, I entreat you, by the friendship you once bore my honoured father, and by the love you cherish for his memory, to retire immediately to bed!" exclaimed Victoria, much alarmed at the ghastly hue of Diego's countenance. "You have already taken every measure for my safety which kindness and humanity could inspire. Then go to rest, my good Diego, happy in the reflexion of having benevolently exerted yourself in protecting and compassionating a hapless captive, ere you knew she had any claim upon your friendship; while I shall pass my night undismayed, secure in the new promise of the kind protection of Heaven intimated to me by this discovery: for surely the hand of Almighty Providence must be traced in thus revealing a powerful friend to me, bound to my family by the bonds of affection, in the moment even of despair."

Diego promised implicit obedience to her request, which he considered as an indis-

putable command; and with Sebastian, who bestowed a tender and affecting benediction upon Victoria, retired; but both remained in the lobby until our heroine and Teresa had fastened the chamber door with all the locks, bars, and chains, which Diego, in his zeal, had fixed upon it.

The moment the sound of their receding footsteps died upon her ear, the recollection of the secret door presented itself, like a hideous phantom, to Victoria's imagination. Vain she now feared were all Diego's kind precautions, since one possible avenue remained unsecured. Shuddering she sunk into her seat, and wistfully fixed her eyes upon the man in armour, filled with the horrid expectation of seeing it recede to admit some of Alonzo's emissaries. Even had Diego been present, she could not inform him of this alarming circumstance without betraying those, by whose means she had discovered its existence; and that she would not do, upon the mere presumption of danger: and that door, which in the morning she had rejoiced at having to escape through, she now beheld with terror. But at length

her reason arose, in fullest force, to combat with her apprehensions; which, after the wonderful proofs she had just received of the signal interposition of Heaven in her behalf, were almost crimes against that beneficent Providence; and after such proofs, could she dare to doubt the continuance of supreme succour? Oh, no; she could not; and she blushed for her weakness, almost bordering upon impiety. She had, too, every reason to believe that passage a secret to Don Manuel and all his adherents.

With renovated fortitude and courage Victoria now arose from her seat to prepare for bed, and with a sweet benignant smile advised Teresa to do so too—advice which the poor exhausted old woman was not slow in following. Our heroine then, after offering up her pure and fervent thanksgivings to Heaven; and deserving, whilst she invoked its protection for yourself, her deliverers, and her friends; undressed, and for the first time since her captivity, ventured to go into bed—Teresa having some minutes before taken possession of the one Hero had occupied the preceding night.

"I wonder, Teresa," said Victoria, as she laid herself down to rest, "I wonder what is become of Hero!—sincerely do I hope no harm may befal the poor deluded creature."

A loud serenading from Teresa's nose was the only answer now received, announcing most unequivocally that her cares for the present were consigned to rest.

"In the days of my happiness," thought Victoria, "what a misfortune should I have considered such a noisy companion in my chamber! and now, alas! how changed the scene! for I am truly thankful for having her allowed to me."

Our heroine now left to her own reflexions, all the extraordinary occurrences of that eventful evening presented themselves in glowing colours to her imagination. The projected villany of Alonzo, whatever it portended, made her shudder; while her fortunate escape from it, and the singular discovery of Diego's connexion with and attachment to her family, filled her bosom with the most lively gratitude to Providence; and in the moment of gratitude her signal obliga-

tions to her gallant deliverers were not forgotten:—and that two of those deliverers were for their humanity thrown into a damp and dreary dungeon gave to her feeling heart infinite affliction; and although she had been positively assured of their perfect safety, she could not divest her mind of those torturing apprehensions her fears of Alonzo's treachery inspired. Any evil befalling Thomas would most sincerely grieve her; but for Hippolyto's safety she experienced infinitely more solicitude. A retrospect of his conduct during that evening placed Hippolyto in the most advantageous point of view. The intrepidity with which he had exposed himself to danger to rescue her from it; the animated courage with which he had defended her; his delicately respectful manner towards her; his humanity to Teresa and those he had assisted to vanquish; his graceful dignity in the moment of surrendering himself to Gonzalvo, when other protection appeared for her; all conspired to elevate him high in our heroine's estimation. Never before had her admiration been called forth so powerfully as on that eventful day. The stranger she met

in the church had in the morning captivated her fancy; Hippolyto in the evening had charmed her reason; and had she been assured that the stranger possessed such mental perfections as Hippolyto had evinced, or that Hippolyto could boast even half the stranger's personal advantages, Victoria's heart had been irrevocably gone: as it was, she almost feared for her peace to see the stranger again; whilst the friendship of Hippolyto she felt anxious to deserve, and looked forward to it, as to a source of the purest satisfaction.

At length the power of reflexion was lost in drowsiness; and after a few moments of mental vacuity, Victoria fell into a slumber—not profound, like Teresa's, and proving of short duration. She started from it, with the horrid phantasy which Morpheus presented to her sleeping imagination of a ghastly spectre gliding through the tapestry door to convey her into Alonzo's power. Wistfully she gazed upon the door and around the room, but beheld nothing to alarm her; yet it was some moments before she could effectually reason herself out of the uncomfortable

sensations this horrid vision of her sleep occasioned; when again recommending herself to the protection of Heaven, she soon fell into a tranquil sleep, in which she most certainly had dreams: but to the eternal disgrace of our unheroinely heroine, we must confess she slept not as she ought to have done for the information of our readers, since not one dream of hers bore the smallest analogy to her future fate.

CHAP. VII.

Soon as Victoria's toilet was completed in the morning, and that she had performed the most important duty of her life, she waited with some impatience for Teresa's re-appearance, who at length arrived at the usual hour, attended by Diego, to summon our heroine to breakfast.

Victoria now felt the most sincere regard for Diego, from his having been beloved by her father, and from the strong attachment he still bore the memory of her respected parent; and that regard, in addition to her gratitude, now led her to extend her hand to him, as she was about to congratulate him upon being sufficiently recovered to leave his chamber: but the moment his hand met her touch, the burning fever it indicated gave her instant alarm; and looking upon his countenance, she was at once confirmed in her apprehensions of serious illness.

"My good Diego," said she, "you are not well. Why, why did you leave your chamber?"

"To wipe away some of my offences, lady Victoria, by evincing my gratitude to my dear lamented lord, in affording that little protection in my power, to his innocent, persecuted, hapless child," he replied in a languid and tremulous voice.

"I am very thankful for your kind intentions, Diego; but effectually to serve me you should be careful of my friends. You must not, therefore, by inattention to your own health, deprive me of that protection so essential to my safety. You are ill, very ill, and you neglect yourself in your solicitude for me. Has signior Sebastian seen you this morning? I wish you would go to bed, and allow signior Pedro to attend you."

"Alas! lady Victoria forgets, in her humanity, her own sad situation. I must accompany you to signior Sebastian; and should he think it safe for me to leave you, I will then go to my chamber; for in truth I fear

illness has, for the first time in my life, overtaken me."

Victoria's countenance expressed so much concern, that Diego strove with all his power to combat an indisposition that was visibly subduing him. With great ingenuity he now fastened the chamber-door, to prevent the possibility of the locks being again damaged; and desiring Teresa to lead the way, he, with tottering steps, attempted to follow Victoria down the stairs: but his head felt so much disordered by indisposition, he was compelled to catch and hold fast the balustrade to prevent his falling. All this was observed by Victoria, whose compassionate eyes had paid strict attention to him; and she now stopped, desiring him to lean upon her and Teresa.

"I cannot afford you much assistance," said she in the sweetest accents of pity; "but my little, aided by Teresa's less, may equal one tolerable supporter."

"This, this is too much!" Diego exclaimed, while large drops stole down his cheeks. "Such kindness and condescension, so truly inherited from my dear lord Altidore,

quite oppress me. Conte Ariosto's child to humble herself thus in compassion to her father's vassal!—a wretch, a miscreant, who assisted in the villany of bringing her to this fatal, fatal place!"

"Diego," said Victoria with that commanding dignity she could with so much native grace assume, "Diego, take my arm." Trembling with confusion, but irresistibly awed into obedience, the poor invalid complied. "The child of conte Ariosto," continued she, "cannot be humbled by the performance of her duty, in affording assistance to those who require it; and him, Diego, whom my father loved, his children must respect; and it is not for me to contemn those whom a sincere contrition for their errors raises in the estimation of our Redeemer. Besides, to you I owe innumerable obligations; and gratitude knows no distinctions, because it has no pride but in evincing itself."

Diego was too much overpowered by sickness and our heroine's kindness to attempt any reply. Supported by her and Teresa he reached the parlour, where Sebastian was

anxiously waiting for Victoria, who respectfully and affectionately paid her morning compliments to him, as she led Diego to a chair, where she desired him to sit. "Signior Sebastian will excuse your doing so," said she, "since you are ill, and he compassionate."

"Ill, indeed!" exclaimed Sebastian, hastily advancing to him; when he kindly took his hand to examine his pulse.

"Ah! signior, I have had a wretched night! for who can rest upon the thorny pillow of compunction? A mind so diseased as mine will soon bring on bodily malady:—horror, sorrow, regret, despair, all combine to agitate and subdue me. My dear lord and benefactor's child is in the castle of Don Manuel; and you too well know, signior, the secrets of that castle to wonder at my grief, my anguish, upon her account, whom I, alas! have little, little hope of ever being able essentially to serve."

"We will talk and think of my situation, Diego, when you are more equal to the task," said Victoria: "at present, for my sake, as well as for your own, you must

think only of conquering this indisposition. Can we do nothing for the poor soul, signior?"

"Certainly we can, and will," replied Sebastian, who ordered Teresa to summon Pedro immediately. "Diego," continued he, "is ill, but not, I am certain, dangerously so; and he only requires a little attention to restore him to health. I would advise his going instantly to bed, and Pedro will administer some composing medicines."

"The world, signior, could not tempt me to retire to my chamber whilst lady Victoria's safety is in danger," said Diego with alarming emphasis.

"Be composed, my good friend," replied Sebastian: "lady Victoria's safety is not for the present threatened with any danger: Francisco has undertaken to protect her until Don Manuel's return."

An expression of the most animated joy beamed over the pallid face of Diego, whilst joy's large drops gushed from his heavy eyes, as he raised his eyes in thankfulness to heaven: and Victoria declaring her astonishment at

Francisco's kindness, Sebastian informed her—

"That Francisco, ever tenacious of his power, was highly incensed at Alonzo's daring to imprison a person whom he protected, and had recommended to Don Manuel's service; and was therefore determined to secure her from Alonzo's villany; and that until Don Manuel's return she might consider herself safe, as if with her own family."

"Then, signior, he has liberated the amiable and gallant Hippolyto," said Victoria eagerly, the purest glow of mingled hope and joy mantling over her cheeks.

"No, my sweet, grateful child," replied Sebastian; "Francisco, although indignant, is too punctilious to interfere with any of Don Manuel's laws. He certainly has power to liberate Hippolyto, but he chooses to pay Don Manuel the compliment of leaving it to him to do it. In the intermediate time he has ordered that Hippolyto, and his brave companion Thomas, shall have every comfort aasigned to them which a prison can admit of. However, in respect to Alonzo,

he has not stood upon the ceremony of waiting for Don Manuel's return to prevent his power of present mischief; for he has placed a strong guard over him in the western tower, whither he has been this morning removed; while Carlos, with the poor deluded creature your attendant, and every person suspected of confederacy with Alonzo, are in close confinement; and strict orders he has just issued to all who remain at liberty, to protect you, my child, from every danger."

Victoria was just beginning to express her gratitude for Francisco's kindness, when Pedro entered; who finding strong symptoms of a nervous fever about Diego, ordered him instantly to bed; and as Victoria had now no immediate danger to apprehend, Sebastian kindly assisted Pedro in leading the poor invalid to his chamber, whither he was attended by our heroine's most fervent good wishes for his speedy recovery.

In about half an hour Sebastian returned with the comforting intelligence of Pedro's only considering Diego's illness occasioned by strong agitation of mind, which quiet

and a little judicious care would soon remove.

So much fear and anxiety was now banished from Victoria's mind, that with something approaching to appetite she sat down to table with her interesting friend, and partook of an excellent breakfast Teresa had prepared for them; which was no sooner ended, than Sebastian informed her he was under the necessity of leaving her for a few hours to fulfil an appointment with Francisco. "Without scruple or anxiety I now can leave you," added he; "and if the tone of your mind will permit it, you can find amusement in the library, or in sketching that beautiful portrait."

The deepest blushes now tinged Victoria's cheeks, and her confusion was most pitiably augmented by finding it observed by her companion, who gazed intently at her with a deeply penetrating eye, as if anxious to develop the cause of her too apparent perturbation.

A pause for some moments ensued. Victoria could not break the—to her, painfully

silent interval; but at length Sebastian did: "Well, I see," he said with a benign smile, "I see my fair philosopher cannot entirely conquer her apprehensions. Suppose then we summon Teresa to attend, and at least, take off the alarming appearance of solitude!"

"Oh! no, no, signior," replied our artless heroine with more eagerness than she wished to have discovered: "I like—I prefer solitude: I mean I am not afraid of it; and then poor Teresa has, must have, so much domestic employment now Diego is unable to assist her, it would be cruelty to trespass upon her time. So, signior, if you please, I will only summon her, if, upon trial, I find my spirits unequal to solitude."

"As you please be it, my child.—Now have you any message to Hippolyto? I shall make him a short visit before I proceed to Francisco."

"Oh, signior, could words express my feelings, I would trouble you with the conveyance of a message long as the soul of gratitude could dictate!—for, oh, signior, but for the noble, brave Hippolyto, what

now might have been my shocking, shocking fate! By his humanity and courage I am here in safety;—for his humanity and courage he is now in prison!" Tears, which the feelings of her grateful heart awakened, stopped her utterance for a few moments: at length she proceeded: "Oh how I envy you, signior! You can visit your friend in prison; whilst I, who caused his being there, am forbidden by the laws of custom and decorum to offer that respect and consolation."

"And would you—would you, visit the dungeon of Hippolyto," said Sebastian, "if decorum gave you permission?"

"Most certainly: for it would be my duty, if by doing so, it could for a moment beguile the sadness of his confinement."

"Would not something like pride revolt at such a condescension? Lady Victoria seems to forget Hippolyto is only domestic to Don Manuel."

"I cannot cease, signior, to remember the misfortunes of my friends; nor can I forget that merit like Hippolyto's must ever claim respect. Those exalted by virtue the

frowns of fortune cannot debase. Nature made Hippolyto an ornament to her works; nor can situation degrade him who is by birth and mind a gentleman."

"Yes," said Sebastian; "although nature drew Hippolyto in shade, he is one of the noblest works her hand ever pourtrayed. Born to better expectations, he and another youth, alike the darling ornament of nature, and outcast of fortune, differing only in complexion, were thrown by their ruthless destiny ..... but I must not, dare not, trust myself upon this soul-rending subject; I will therefore hasten to my poor Hippolyto's dungeon."

"Go, signior, and testify by this consoling attention, your friendship to that gallant being; whilst I can only by these messages, you will have the goodness to convey for me, manifest my lively gratitude."

"Then come, my child," replied Sebastian with a sweet smile of benignity and pleasure pervading his sad yet fine countenance: "accompanied by me, there can surely be no impropriety; and such a flattering conde-

scension will illumine the dungeon of poor Hippolyto, and effectually banish sadness from his prison."

Victoria instantly arose, and gave her hand to Sebastian, who led her through the great hall into a long passage which terminated at a large iron door, where he pulled a heavy sounding bell, and immediately Gonzalvo appeared.

"We would visit Hippolyto," said Sebastian, and showed Francisco's signet.

Gonzalvo, taking a lamp from his room, preceded Sebastian and our heroine through an adjoining door, which opened upon a long flight of steps which they descended, and in a few moments entered a winding passage of immense length, branching off in a variety of directions; where, on each side of the leading passage and all its deviations, were ranged at equal and trifling distances low doors, strongly plated with iron, and secured by massy bolts and other enormous fastenings—doors which Victoria but too truly conjectured led to the noisome prison of many a hapless sufferer. This afflicting idea filled her heart with inexpressible sadness; but no sooner

did the direful clinking of chains, with deep-drawn sighs and groans issuing through many of those doors, assail her ears, than grief and horror almost subdued her, and Sebastian now found increased difficulty in supporting her trembling frame to Hippolyto's prison. One bolt alone secured his door; and Gonzalvo, entering first, respectfully announced the approaching visitors.

"The captive lady coming to see me!" repeated Hippolyto in a tone of excessive trepidation and surprise, as he darted towards the door. "Gracious Heaven! tis true! Oh, madam! lady Victoria! what, what could have induced such an unexpected, such an unmerited condescension?"

"Your humanity, and my gratitude," said she. "Signior Sebastian thought, when accompanied by him, there could be no impropriety in visiting my deliverers in that prison where serving me had placed them." Victoria now entered, and looking around, "Alas!" she exclaimed, "and is this place the reward of humanity?" She could add no more; but, bursting into tears, sunk into the seat Hippolyto had just arisen from.

Gonzalvo, now retiring, took his station in the passage; and Thomas, who shared this prison, and whose wound was in a most promising state, respectfully retreated to one corner of the dungeon, while Sebastian and Hippolyto, in the most earnest terms, entreated our heroine to be composed.

"Distress me not, I conjure you, lady Victoria," said Hippolyto, "by such excess of compassion. Our confinement here will prove but of short continuance, believe me; and even whilst here we shall experience no grief, no inconvenience, but in being deprived of the liberty still to attend you, to watch over, to protect you from every danger."

Victoria, about to reply, raised her beautifully intelligent eyes, beaming with sorrow and genuine gratitude; when suddenly meeting Hippolyto's, she clearly saw in them such a lively and unequivocal expression of tender anxiety, that quite startled and distressed, she again bent her eyes to the ground, whilst the brightest glow of confusion overspread her cheeks.

Whether Sebastian made any observation

or not, he instantly relieved her embarrassment, though not her concern, by calling Hippolyto's attention from the too lovely Victoria to a recital of Francisco's resolutions and arrangements; to which Hippolyto listened with the most evident delight, as they were auspicious to Victoria's safety.

Thomas, with his accustomed unintelligibility, expressed his pleasure too, happy in the prospect of our heroine's security, but charmed to ecstasy at the idea of Alonzo's disappointment and mortification.—"And may I, your honours, be bold," added he, "and crave what cheer with the Teresa, and my brave messmate Diego? It heaves up a strong swell of wonderment why he thus keeps abaft, and has not yet steered to this port to see into the state of our rigging."

Victoria now called forth the most profound and enraptured attention of Hippolyto, whilst she sweetly and simply related the discovery of Diego's connexion with her family, its alarming effect upon him, and his severe illness.

Hippolyto was evidently affected by her

artless and interesting little history; but the good it portended to Victoria almost effaced by pleasure his pity for Diego.

For some little time longer they held a serious conversation upon the state of affairs in the castle; and mutually charmed with each other's discourse, Victoria and Hippolyto saw with regret Sebastian's motion for separation. Hippolyto, in the most graceful and animated terms, expressed his gratitude for the honour and pleasure our heroine had conferred upon him by her visit; whilst she in return felt he had arisen still higher in her estimation; and she should have remembered this interview with satisfaction, had not concern officiously reminded her of having observed that, which indicated a stronger degree of solicitude for her fate, than she could have wished Hippolyto to feel for her.

Gonzalvo now conducted these friendly visitors out of his district; and Sebastian attended Victoria to the library, where he waited until she had perfectly recovered that agitation of spirits this new and dismal scene had awakened; and then took leave, assuring her of perfect security during his absence.

Victoria, now alone, felt her spirits awakened to a perturbation of a different nature. The hour was approaching fast for her to fulfil or fail in her appointment with the stranger; and what line of conduct to pursue was now her difficulty. She had, alas! no one to advise her. Her own judgment or inclination only now could guide her—the feeble judgment of eighteen, the rash inclinations of youth. Disappointed wishes and opinions had not yet introduced suspicion into the ingenuous mind of Victoria: artless herself, she thought the world in general so; and nothing less than downright conviction had ever yet allowed her to believe, that the apparently amiable could be deceitful. The man, therefore, whom her fancy represented to her as one of the most perfect of human beings, she never once thought it possible to find insincere, or capable of treachery. She had consequently no fears for her safety, but she had many doubts as to the propriety of meeting him. He had not ventured his life for her preservation; and gratitude had no claim upon her, except for promised kindness. Besides, she had no Sebastian to ac-

company her, and destroy the indecorum of the interview. Delicacy, flowing from the spring of nature, filled, in its most refined purity, Victoria's spotless heart: it inspired her every thought; it dictated her every word, and attended all her actions. The idea, therefore, of an assignation with a man, young and a stranger, unprotected to forlornness as she was, could not but startle her; while some innovating guest sprung forward to laugh at her scruples, and inspiring wishes to overthrow them.

CHAP. VIII.

EVERY reason and argument that delicacy and inclination could deduce now agitated Victoria's mind for and against attending her appointment, but without conviction on either side until the clock struck twelve; and she was startled by the sound into a perturbation of spirits destructive to the power of offering any confutation to the last suggestions of her mind, which inclination prompted, desiring her to remember that the stranger had promised to effect her escape, at the moment he gave liberty to his friends; that he might be the very being deputed by Heaven to deliver her from destruction, which the extraordinary circumstances leading to their meeting almost induced her to believe; and, if she disregarded him, she might probably have to bewail her own wilful blindness to the mercy of Providence. The stranger too had informed her of the situation of his affections; and

there could be little of indelicacy, whatever there might be of temerity, in it; and to calm her doubts and apprehensions, had he not taught her the method of retreating into the library? And, independent of all these motives, had she not in her possession some property of his, or his friends, of considerable value? and every feeling of equity must urge the immediate restoration of it.

These arguments, unanswered, proved victorious; and as the clock struck the last stroke of twelve our heroine tremulously and fearfully arose, and, looking cautiously around her, approached the map against which she was to press to gain an admittance into the church; but there she stopped, alarmed, and apprehending the eye of observation. She thought of the passage from her chamber as being more secret; but the terrors of the preceding night made her shrink from the idea of going through the scene of them, unattended, except by fears, which the uncertainty of the propriety of what she was premeditating would most forcibly augment.

At length, after many efforts, she sum-

moned sufficient courage to press the actuating spring; when immediately the pannel receded, and through a small aperture she beheld the stranger at the foot of the monument, standing with folded arms, and eyes anxiously fixed upon the chasm. It was now too late, even had she wished it, to change her intention; for he saw her on the moment, and, as she pushed the pannel open for admission, hastily sprung forward to receive and to assist her; and after closing the aperture with much speed and circumspection, he seated himself by her on the base of the monument, close to the spring that would re-admit her to the library, and in the most respectful and animated terms expressed his gratitude for the confidence she thus reposed in him.

Victoria entered the church with a fluttering heart and trembling frame; and for some moments her agitation deprived her of the power of articulating: but the respectfulness of the stranger's manners towards her, the soothing kindness of his address, the fascinating sweetness of his voice, and, above all, his delicacy and consideration in

voluntarily placing her close to the only spot where an instantaneous retreat could be in her power, combined to calm her fears and perturbation, and in a very few moments restored her to perfect composure;—when a long and interesting conversation commenced, by which our heroine was soon convinced that the stranger possessed graces of manners, and refinement of mind, equal at least to Hippolyto; and, whilst she listened with delight, she trembled at the fascination which she found was every moment increasing fast. Yet, in defiance of this fascination, powerful as it was, Prudence never for one moment forsook her lovely charge, and Victoria only related to her attentive auditor what this sapient guide directed as necessary for him to be informed of: therefore, in mentioning Alonzo and her gallant rescue, she bestowed her high encomiums upon her deliverers, but forbore to express any thing that might lead to a suspicion of their disaffection to Don Manuel.

Her heart now persuaded her to believe the stranger ingenuous, benevolent, and sincere; but the more eloquently her heart

spoke in his favour, the more conscious she became of the imbecility of her judgment, and more rigorous in her obedience to her intellectual monitors; so that she uttered not one word which prudence or reason could have wished recalled.

The stranger, on his part, had nothing of moment to communicate, except that his preparations for escape were in much greater forwardness, his plans more promising, and his hopes of a speedy termination to the captivity of those he wished to liberate, much more sanguine than they had been on the preceding day. But the same mystery still enveloped him; and the interdict against his being more communicative upon some important subjects, he told her, was not yet withdrawn. But he so judiciously contrived it, that not a pause in conversation occurred to yield Victoria an opportunity of departing until the unwelcome stroke of one, sounded from the dome clock. Dejectedly he arose from his seat; Victoria sprung from hers.

"How rapidly has time flown since twelve!" said he, sighing, "only to creep more languidly until my good destiny influ-

ences you to honour me with another interview. May I, dare I, presume to supplicate for the happiness of seeing you again to-morrow, should nothing intervene to render your coming hither impracticable?"

Victoria hesitated; and the deepest glow of vermilion tinged her cheeks.

A heightened colour overspread the stranger's countenance too; and mournfully he said, "Alas! you fear to confide in my honour, and I am not permitted to remove suspicion from your mind."

"I entertain no suspicion where you are in question, believe me, signior," replied Victoria with an air of the most fascinating artlessness, while her blushes deepened, and her tearful eyes sought the ground to conceal her painful emotions; "but I have no one to advise me, and I only hesitated to consider if my secret interviews with a perfect stranger would be a measure likely to meet the approbation of the dear and faultless being who was my instructor and my guide from my earliest days until this hapless period; and although she, alas! is now far, far distant from me, I

should wish still to conduct myself as if her watchful eye was yet observing me."

"And if it was," said he with the most animated energy, "nothing could meet it but that which must give maternal transport to her heart. Beholding such spotless purity, could she see any thing but glory to herself, reflected from the refinement of those virtues her precepts strengthened, but which had a deeper source even from Nature's self? Were you now under the protection of your family, I would be one of the last persons upon earth, believe me, to urge you to these clandestine meetings; nor do I take advantage of the unguarded situation your ruthless destiny has thrown you into, to persuade you to less propriety of conduct than I should wish you to pursue were you still in the bosom of your family; but that very hapless situation, which leaves you unprotected, calls on me to do it. It impels me on to serve you, and makes it absolutely necessary that we should sometimes meet, and there exists no other method of our doing so. The ideas that so lately actuated your conduct cannot now guide you,

since now, alas! you must implicitly tread the thorny path your pitiless fate has here marked out for you. Deprived of that society most congenial to the delicacy of your mind, you yet acquiesce with patient submission to a doom your heart revolts from: then let me, I conjure you, not endure the pain and mortification of considering myself the most obnoxious of those beings your misfortunes have thrown you amongst, or the hapless one whom you most sedulously shun."

"It is true, alas! too true," replied Victoria in a sweet plaintive tone of the most touching sadness, "that I am bereft of all society but of men, all strangers to me. In Don Manuel's castle it is my inevitable doom, to which I must submit; and though my heart shrinks from it, it does not reproach me. But in coming hither to meet you, signior, there is no compulsion. Voluntarily I come, the unbiassed agent of my own free-will; and surely great is the difference between the acts we voluntarily commit, and those we are compelled to."

The sweetest smile of animated approba-

tion played on the stranger's countenance; and his eyes were illumined with such a lively expression of admiration and gladness, that Victoria, astonished, embarrassed, pleased, and perplexed, turned her face aside to conceal from his attentive observation the emotions too visibly delineated there; and after a moment's pause the stranger spoke—

"I will advance nothing further, to urge you to a compliance with my request. For worlds I would not mislead such purity. I will therefore leave it to your own feelings to determine; and shall attend here at twelve to-morrow, in the pleasing but anxious hope of their candidly determining in my favour."

Victoria paused for a moment, and then said, with all that bewitching artlessness the innocent ingenuousness of her mind inspired, "Ah, signior, you spoke too truly, when you said the ideas which so lately actuated my conduct cannot guide me now. Repugnant as my feelings may be to these *secret* interviews, I yet must not hesitate to continue them, since by them only can I possibly be informed of how, and when,

that liberty you have so humanely promised me is to be effected. Forgive, I entreat you, signior, my appearance of ingratitude. Of your honour and integrity I had no suspicion, believe me; I only doubted the propriety of my thus meeting you. To-morrow I will again be here, should nothing intervene to prevent the performance of my promise."

The stranger, in evident transport, most gracefully expressed his gratitude for the confidence with which she honoured him; and respectfully taking her hand (which he would have pressed, in token of his thankfulness, had not the recollection of the delicacy of her unprotected situation withheld him), he led her through the pannel, first ascertaining there being no observer, and with a pensively anxious look, and mournful voice, he bade her farewell; and whilst she was making her way, with trembling steps, into the library, his eyes followed her with such an increasing expression of tender solicitude and sadness, still holding the pannel open, that she was compelled, several times, to remind him of his imprudence, be-

fore he seemed to collect sufficient power to shut her from his sight.

Our heroine, now alone, sunk into a seat, so agitated by hope and fear, so pleased, so sad, so fascinated, so perplexed, that her mind was all in tumult with contending sensations; and it was some time after her return to the library before she recollected that she had not restored the picture. Sensibly shocked at her unpardonable omission, she drew the portrait from her pocket, blushing at her want of memory; and a deeper and a still deeper tint of vermilion overspread her cheeks as she looked upon this proof of her negligence, dwelling on the resemblance of every feature, which but so short a period before she beheld animated by the sense and sweetly interesting elegance of the original, or saddened by solicitude for her safety. "For hers!"—Soothing idea, which she fondly cherished; and, almost happy, she continued earnestly gazing upon the picture, until the recollection of the stranger's having, in their first interview, declared his attachment to another, darted like

a hideous phantom into her imagination, chilling her heart, and blighting at once the sweet budding blossoms of new-born hope.

"Alas!" said she, so absorpt in her painful feelings, that she was quite unconscious of articulating her thoughts—"alas! I had forgotten—he does love—but not me!" Large drops stole from her eyes. "Fie on this weakness!" continued she; "I will not, no, I will not cherish it." Hastily she wiped the tears away; and meaning to replace the portrait in her pocket, she turned her head to guide her hand, and beheld, reflected by the sun-beams, that were at that moment shining very strong upon the floor, her own shadow, and the lengthened one of a man, who seemed standing close behind her. Almost annihilated by confusion and terror, she started up and quickly turned; but no one could she see; the shadow was gone, and with it every trace of any being having been there.

Trembling with dismay, she flew to a bell, and rang a summons for Teresa. She had been sitting at much too considerable a distance from the pannel to admit of that being possibly the method of so speedy a retreat;

and she was too certain of the appearance of the shadow to doubt, for a moment, of some one's having been there. She felt no inclination to believe it a supernatural semblance; and that therefore some mortal man was absolutely in possession of the secret of her partiality stung her delicacy to the quick; whilst apprehension, lest any evil should be the consequence to the stranger, filled her mind with inconceivable terror; and so totally did shame and alarm subdue her, that she was unable to repress her tears when Teresa entered.

"Gracious Heaven! what can have happened to make you weep so piteously, dear donna?" exclaimed the poor old compassionating woman. "Why, sure, I thought your cares and fears all were lulled by Francisco, for this blessed day at least!

As soon as Victoria's tears would permit her to speak, she, without mentioning the picture, informed Teresa of the alarm she had just sustained from the strange appearance of the shadow. Teresa discovered evident symptoms of fear, but none of surprise, at what she heard; for, notwithstand-

ing the advantages of a tolerable education, her mind was so enervated by age, misfortunes, and the horrors she had for many years been doomed to witness, that it was now totally under the dominion of trembling superstition, which conjured up a thousand phantoms as appropriate to that library, where she almost believed the ghost of every author there, whether damned or not, haunted their own works.

Teresa took a seat by the desire of Victoria, who, inspired with courage by the presence of a companion, exerted herself to conquer her tears; and, although deeply mortified and alarmed, she at length became apparently composed; when she inquired "if Teresa had lately any account of Diego—"

"No, donna; I was going to take some nourishment to him, by Pedro's orders, when you summoned me hither."

"But you sent it to him—"

"No, donna; I had no one to send it by."

"Then fly with it directly to him; think not of me whilst he requires your care;

and if it is possible, soon comfort me with the intelligence of his being better."

Teresa immediately departed, and Victoria felt all her coward sensations revive; but which she lost no time in striving to subdue; and she was just beginning to look without fear around her, when she heard the approach of Sebastian; and dreading his questions as to how she had passed her moments of solitude, she hastily snatched a book from a shelf near her, and affected to be deeply engaged in the perusal of it; while, in fact, she was attentive only to catch an unembarrassed air as he advanced, and took a seat beside her.

"Well, my child," said he, kindly taking her trembling hand, "how have you been since we parted? I hope you have contrived to find some amusement?"

"I, I," she hesitatingly replied, "I, signior, have been striving to collect my distracted ideas sufficiently to allow me to read."

"And I, by coming hither unexpectedly, have discovered a secret." Pitiable was now the confusion and anguish of our heroine. She trembled, she changed colour, and her

heart seemed ready to bound from its seat. Sebastian continued: "Highly as I have found your mind cultivated, I was not aware of your understanding Greek."

Victoria now for the first time observed the letter of the book she was holding, and found the character was indeed Greek. She was embarrassed; but relieved from an apprehension of the secret he had discovered being *that* her delicacy trembled at his knowing, her mind filled with sudden joy, almost too great for concealment.

"My knowledge, signior, is indeed by no means so profound," said she: "Teresa has but this moment left me; and eager to reassume my study, I snatched up a wrong book, and hearing you approach prevented my observing the ridiculous mistake."

"What then was your study?" replied Sebastian: "we can now pursue it together."

Victoria averted her face to hide a blush that overspread it; and, shrinking from the idea of entering deeper into the mazes of falsehood, she precipitately arose, and requested Sebastian, if not disagreeable to him,

to accompany her in a short walk, as she thought the air might be of service in removing a strange degree of languor which had been stealing over her for some days past, and a severe headach that she was just beginning to feel.

Sebastian instantly arose in compliance; when, looking intently at her, he shook his head, and mournfully said, "Ah! I see you have not passed your time in reading—you have been weeping, my sweet child; and I fear you will, by this indulgence of grief, have bodily as well as mental illness to contend with. I would chide, was it possible to be angry with you:—but come into the grounds, and I will only tell you how it grieves me to see you thus."

He drew her hand with paternal tenderness through his arm, and led her to a shady walk in the garden; where, with his mild and instructive conversation, he strengthened her fortitude, and beguiled her griefs of half their poignancy. But much as she confided in him, and highly as she venerated his virtues, she forbore to mention her alarm from the shadow, lest his inquiry should

lead him to a substance from whom he could learn her humiliating secret, which she fervently wished no one further to participate in. At length they were summoned to the castle, where, *tête-à-tête*, they dined, attended by Juan, who gave them a very promising account of Diego.

CHAP. IX.

Soon after dinner, Sebastian was obliged to depart, to fulfil an appointment with Francisco; but ere he left our heroine, he made her promise, that should her too evident indisposition not be considerably better by his return, she would allow him to summon Pedro to prescribe for her; and Victoria, once more left alone, determined to avail herself of this opportunity, in a time of promised safety, of going to her chamber to make some arrangements there for the moment of her anxiously hoped-for escape. Accordingly she hastened thither; and as she gently approached Diego's door, she saw it open, and Pedro in the room, whom she beckoned to her, to inquire from him how all his patients were going on?—Diego, he assured her, was much amended; and Alon-

zo, with his wounded confederates, in a very promising way. Happy at this intelligence, she entered her chamber, where she selected from her baggage every valuable trinket she found there, and formed them into two small parcels, to be taken in her pockets at the time of her escape. She then made many arrangements in her wardrobe, to conduce to her comfort during her continuance in the castle, which she now fondly hoped would not be very long; and as this was the first time of her ever officiating in this part of the business of a *fille de chambre*, she was not very expeditious; and, added to the tardiness of inexperience, she had to contend with the inactivity her fast increasing lassitude and indisposition naturally inspired; so that twilight had been for some time come on before she had completed her task, and the gloominess of the castle made it appear almost dark when she quitted her chamber to return to the parlour. Diego's door was closed; and hearing no noise issuing from his room, she concluded that he was sleeping.

Gently therefore she descended the staircase, the gloom of which, and the awful

silence that reigned, increased the irritation of her nerves. But great and dreadful was the shock they sustained, when, as she was about to step from the staircase into the passage leading to the great hall, a strong ray of light suddenly gleamed upon her, and the black knight she had seen in the library crossed her path: his visor was up, and she beheld the cadaverous countenance of death. Victoria stopped, trembled, and held the balustrade to save herself from falling, while her distended eyes strained wistfully after the spectre. The light in an instant vanished, and all was a black void. She heard a deep groan, her heart beat painfully; again the light gleamed, again the knight flitted across her path, and the countenance was changed to the fleshless face of a skeleton. Victoria now wildly shrieked, and darted up the staircase, at the top of which she fell senseless into the arms of Pedro, who had been drawn by her scream from Diego's chamber.

Our totally insensible heroine was now carried by the humane surgeon to her own room; where assisted by Teresa, whom he

summoned without disturbing Diego, who was sleeping, and whose well-doing Pedro knew would be materially impeded by a knowledge of the alarming situation of Victoria, used every possible method for her recovery; and at length her respiration returned, but not her perception. The terror she had just experienced seemed the signal for that indisposition which for some hours had been threatening her to begin its attack, which it now did with so much violence and rapidity, that the course of a few hours more found her in the delirium of a very dangerous fever, which for five days seemed to deride the skill of signior Pedro; during which period she had no interval of reason, and all the horrors she had encountered in Spain seemed ever present to her diseased imagination; while fancy pourtrayed the shade of both her parents still hovering near to guard her from every threatened evil; while the stranger from the church, the old man and his beautiful daughter, she thought she constantly saw employed in her chamber, sometimes preparing medicines for her relief, at others plotting together to give her poison.

But whatever her fancies might be, the reality was, that she was most carefully and tenderly nursed; and to this indefatigable attention, to the great abilities and exertions of Pedro, and to her own youth and unimpaired constitution, all aided by pitying Heaven, was she indebted for being snatched from the grasp of death; who for many hours appeared, even to those most interested for her fate, to have marked her for his immediate prey.

On the fifth day of her illness, Pedro, with unfeigned pleasure, pronounced her out of danger. Her senses soon returned, to animate her torpid frame, and she beheld no one in her chamber but Pedro, Sebastian, and Teresa; the two latter sitting, one by each side of her bed, anxiously watching her, as if she was their own offspring, and the only treasure they had in life.

From the moment her fever was arrested in its progress, and its virulence conquered, Victoria visibly amended every hour, and her recovery was as rapid as her illness had been from its commencement to its height; and in a very short interval of time she was able to leave her chamber, though still weak

and languid. To Sebastian and Teresa her gratitude was unbounded for their parental and tender care of her; and to Pedro she evinced her ideas of what she owed to his skill and attention, by offering him as handsome a gratuity as the state of her finances would admit of, aided by some trinkets of considerable value; all of which he respectfully but peremptorily refused to take, except one ring, which he said "he would have the honour of wearing, to remind him of the highest pleasure he had ever experienced in his profession—that of having been serviceable to her." But while her gratitude was thus forcibly awakened, she had much concern to mingle with another claim upon it; by finding that her indisposition had greatly increased Diego's, from whom a knowledge of it could not long be concealed; since from the vicinity of his chamber he soon learned there was some unusual commotion in hers. And to lull the dreadful apprehensions that instantly presented themselves to his alarmed imagination, Pedro informed him of her illness, suppressing the greatness of it, and the

serious fears he for many hours entertained for her life.

In the first moments of Victoria's return to reason, she informed Sebastian and Pedro of the dreadful alarm she had sustained from the appearance of the black knight; and every inquiry was immediately made by Francisco, who possessed the power of unlocking the secrets of all hearts within the castle, to find out the cause of such a terrible alarm—but without effect; and Pedro gave it as his opinion, that she was under the dominion of her fever when she descended the stairs, and that her disordered imagination had formed the ghastly phantom. This opinion was also Sebastian's, and Victoria wished to persuade herself that they were right.

Amongst the first feelings which agitated the mind of our heroine, upon her recovery, was fear of the stranger's having effected the emancipation of his friends during her illness; and that her too cruel destiny had intervened to consign her to perpetual misery and captivity. Her failing in her appointment, unaccounted for as it was, she fancied might,

from its appearance of rudeness and ingratitude, have disgusted him, and rendered him regardless of her safety. Yet he seemed too kind and compassionate to be easily induced to forsake a cause his humanity had led him voluntarily into; and he, who certainly had intelligence of many transactions in the castle, might also hear of her severe indisposition, and therefore feel no cause for displeasure, though still he might have been obliged to depart without her.

To relieve her mind from the insupportable agony of uncertainty, precipitated her into leaving her chamber even before she found her strength sufficiently recovered for the exertion, and infinitely sooner than Pedro wished. But, for the first time in her life, Victoria was inexorable to the advice of her friends; and for this obstinacy fate seemed determined to punish her, in the paternal tenderness and attention of Sebastian, who prevented all her efforts for gaining an unobserved entrance into the church, by his fear of her meeting with any new alarm, to occasion a relapse, inducing him never to leave her for a moment, except when he could

consign her to the care of Pedro or Teresa; who, on their parts, seemed inspired with the same opposition to her wishes: and the disappointment this officious kindness inflicted increasing by delay, the torments of incertitude, almost taught the placid grateful Victoria unthankfulness and petulance.

Day after day passed on without her being able to effect a visit to the church, to learn if all her hopes were blighted, and her doom misery and bondage; and at length, almost fretted by the irritation of suspense into a relapse, she one day at dinner discovered such symptoms of indisposition, that Sebastian in alarm summoned Pedro, who advised her retiring to her chamber, to indulge for an hour or two in a siesta; and to procure a tranquillising slumber for her, he would give her a gentle soporific. To oblige Sebastian, whose wishes were now laws to our grateful heroine, she complied with Pedro's prescription, and soon fell, in despite of the misery of her mind, into a profound sleep, which continued several hours. At length she awoke, considerably refreshed, and more composed and tranquil than she had found

herself for many days; when, according to Pedro's orders, Teresa (who had watched by her while she slept) left her to inform him that Victoria was awake; but in a few moments the poor old woman returned with looks aghast—

"Ah, donna! donna!" cried she in an agony of sympathising distress, "all the good signior Pedro's stuff has done you will soon be destroyed; for, as sure as we are both alive, I saw that wretch Garcias as I was crossing the hall; and no sooner did I see his hateful form than I hobbled back as fast as I could, to tell you to keep the door fastened, while I go to signior Pedro; for I am sure safety never dwells where that miscreant Garcias is."

Dreadful indeed was the shock this intelligence gave to Victoria. She now believed the term of her promised safety was expired, and the hopes of her escape all blighted. In breathless agony she entreated Teresa to learn if Garcias was come back alone, and to return to her as speedily as possible. Teresa promising to comply, departed; when the trembling terror-struck Victoria fastened the

door with every bolt, bar, and chain poor Diego had affixed to it, and then threw herself upon her bed in a state of unutterable anguish. For a considerable time she continued in a state of the most woeful despondence, before religion's powerful sway could calm her dejection, and restore hope, fortitude, and resignation. But that ever-tranquillising influence at length succeeded, and Victoria was beginning to collect the forces of her mind, and her heart to warm in the sunshine of animating hope and reliance upon the protection of Heaven, when this new-raised structure of firmness was shook to the foundation by a summons delivered by Juan, from Don Manuel, to favour him with her company at supper.

Words cannot express, nor the mind conceive, the horror that now chilled Victoria's heart, forbidding it to beat, except with agonising woe, with trembling terror, and all the miseries of despair. Obedience to the mandate was inevitable; and with all the sad calmness which a certainty of destruction inspired, she was ready to attend Teresa when sent to conduct her down. Invoking the aid

of every pitying angel and saint, she took Teresa's arm, and descended the staircase with a frame convulsed by apprehension.

"Ah! my dear donna, how my heart bleeds for you!" said Teresa, as they tremulously proceeded to the parlour. "I well knew how alarmed and distressed you would be. Don Manuel has been returned near three hours; and I was ordered not to go near you until I was sent to conduct you down. They have brought some more captives with them, it seems, and employment for signior Pedro too; so he could not come to you. And I could not see signior Sebastian, to tell him what an alarm I left you in; for Garcias has ordered him to keep to his own apartments for the present; and he, poor gentleman, must obey. My master has seen Alonzo; who has made his story good, no doubt, since that wicked girl Hero is now out of confinement, and has been in the parlour this hour past. But, my dear sweet young lady, if you tremble so, and are so terrified, Pedro will have you again for a patient before the night's out; and should you be ill, you will not have those to nurse you now

who would be tender and kind to you. But let me entreat you not to be so agitated and alarmed; for sure I am they never could have the heart to injure you. Indeed I have heard some of our most sanguinary ruffians say, were they ordered to assassinate you, they must do it in the dark, and with their ears stopped; for, were they to see your face, or hear the sound of your voice, the weapon of death would fall from their hands. And besides, you know, dear donna, Don Manuel himself dare not now harm you, as Francisco is you friend."

This last sentence penetrated in a gleam of comfort to the wretched Victoria's bleeding heart just as they reached the parlour, at the door of which Don Manuel, with much apparent impatience, was in waiting to receive our heroine, to whom he gracefully and tenderly paid his compliments; and with an air of respectful gallantry took her passive hand, and led, or rather supported her, since without support she must have fallen, to a seat at the upper end of the table where supper was served; and taking his own place beside her, he announced her to those as-

sembled, as "the fascinating mistress of his heart, the lovely queen of his castle, to whom he required the most profound homage to be paid by all who hoped to gain or preserve his favour."

Shocked by sounds so torturing to her delicacy, Victoria was awakened from her stupor of woe, to contempt and indignation, which she only withheld from manifesting by prudence, who loudly called to her not to exasperate him; and while the crimson hue of shame and anger tinged her cheeks, she cast her eyes downwards to conceal the expression that strongly irradiated them; and she obtained sufficient command over her feelings to allow her receiving the further adulations and attentions of Don Manuel, without betraying the disgust and misery he awakened and inflicted.

It may be well imagined Victoria partook not of the repast. Thought was her banquet, and comfortless it was; until Teresa's last words, like a succouring friend, darted into her remembrance, vibrating in her ears, and renovating her almost annihilated courage, by dependence upon Heaven, through the

medium of Francisco's protection; and at length she became sufficiently collected to admit of her observing the persons round the table, to learn whom she had to fear, and whom she might expect the consolation of sympathy from. No voice as yet, except Don Manuel's, had reached her ears; for, as his whole attention had been devoted to her, the rest of the party had preserved an unbroken silence.

Seated by Don Manuel's left hand, she beheld Hero pale and dejected. Victoria would have pitied her, had she not observed that whenever that deluded creature's eyes turned upon her there was a strong expression of sullenness and malice in them, which made her shudder.

Next to Hero sat a stranger, dressed in the habit of a Piedmontese peasant, a most uncommonly handsome man, of about three or four-and-twenty, whose air and deportment so ill accorded with his garb, that it required no great share of penetration to discover his rank in life being far above the one he by his dress seemed anxious to be classed amongst. Victoria was surprised; and her surprise was

increased by a belief that she had somewhere seen a face like his. But her mind was not sufficiently at ease to remember at once, if she really had any knowledge of him, whether she had ever seen him before, or if it was only a resemblance to any other person that seemed to make his features familiar to her; and she was prevented from making any further observation, by finding herself most earnestly gazed at by the stranger, whose large dark and beautiful eyes were so riveted upon her face, that she could not again even steal a glance unobserved by him.

Next to this stranger, and at the bottom of the table, she beheld Garcias seated; the sight of whom awakened so many horrors in her breast, that she hastily turned her eyes from him to his neighbour, who was also her own, with anxiety to learn what his appearance portended. He was habited like the other stranger, and like him, too, his air proclaimed his garb beneath his rank. His face he seemed evidently studious to conceal from Victoria. But that solicitude, by awakening her wonder and curiosity, defeated its own aim; and in a few moments she

contrived to see sufficient of his countenance to harrow up her soul; for, in beholding her profligate uncle, conte Vicenza, the being of all others from whom her spotless heart most recoiled, she believed herself irretrievably lost. Fear now, with its icy fingers, grasped her heart, almost preventing respiration; a death-like dew overspread her forehead; a ghastly paleness stole on her countenance; objects became indistinct; she closed her eyes, and with a chilling universal shiver sunk back in her chair.

The young stranger, attentive only to Victoria, first observed the alarming alteration in her lovely countenance, and instantly announced her indisposition. Don Manuel, in excessive consternation, ordered Pedro to be summoned, and then, with the rest of the party, gathered round her to offer every assistance; while Polydore, in the general confusion, took an opportunity to whisper to her (for, as he saw her observation of him, he well guessed the cause of her indisposition) entreaties, "if she prized her safety, and valued her liberty, to be circumspect, and conceal her knowledge of him and *his nephew*."

The sound of conte Vicenza's voice proved more efficacious than any other remedy to our heroine. Terror gave to her limbs the power of supporting her; and, regardless of his entreaties, unmindful of every consequence, she started from her seat, and wildly darted to the opposite side of the room; where sinking upon her knees before a chair, and reclining her head upon the seat of it, she burst i to a passion of tears which afforded much relief to her almost bursting heart; and then, with uplifted hands, and raising her streaming eyes to heaven, she, in a voice broken by convulsive sobs, implored protection.

"Alas! alas!" exclaimed Don Manuel, "this lovely amiable creature's intellects are deranged."

"If so, signior," said conte Vicenza, in Italian, with much solemnity, "it is fortunate, for the signora at least, my being brought hither, as it has been for years my melancholy province to attend to the unfortunate of my species afflicted with distempers of the brain. Few in Italy who have not heard of dottore Impazzato Delirio; and my

fame has travelled even into this country; for I was now journeying from my own snug villa in Piedmont, to prove my skill in recovering, from a long deprivation of reason, the wife of a wealthy merchant residing at Tortosa, to whom I was sent for to——"

"Leave the merchant and his wife to the care of the d—l!" exclaimed Don Manuel, impetuously interrupting him, "and attend to the situation of this most fascinating of human beings. If my dreadful apprehensions are verified, and that you restore her to that sense which was so lately the admiration and delight of all around her, liberty and twenty thousand pistoles shall be your reward."

Conte Vicenza, bowing profoundly, promised to exert his skill for the restoration of the poor signora's reason; and then advanced to Victoria, whose hand he attempted to take, but which she, with vehemence, snatched away.

"By this violence and obstinacy, signora," said he significantly, "you will destroy yourself, and totally prevent my serving you, which I could else do most essentially."

"You serve me!" exclaimed she in a tone of the most touching anguish. "Oh, Father of mercies, protect me! save me from his machinations!"

"Signior, alas! the poor signora is insane, past every doubt," said Polydore; "but I do not despair of being yet serviceable to her, although some of her fantastic phantasies represent me to her as an enemy." Again he attempted to take her hand. In a moment Victoria was upon her feet, and would have fled to some one present for refuge; but, upon looking around her, she saw no one to whom she could apply for succour. The forlorn hopelessness of her situation struck with an agonising thrill to the bottom of her heart; a groan of anguish escaped her; and, tottering, she sunk into a chair, covering her face with her hands to shut out a view of those her soul sickened at beholding, whilst a torrent of tears again burst from her eyes.

"These tears," said Don Manuel in a tone of much interest, "these tears, I should hope, signior, are an auspicious symptom."

"I doubt not that they are," replied the conte; "and I trust, after an uncontrolled

flow of them, we may have the satisfaction of finding the signora, if not more reasonable, at least more tractable."

"We have in this castle," said Garcias sullenly, "dungeons, with every requisite for coercion that you can possibly want for taming this refractory maniac."

At this moment Pedro entered. "I sent for you," said Don Manuel mournfully to him, "to give into your care this lovely being, who is dearer, far dearer to my heart than language can express. But, alas! I now fear that even you can be of little service to her, since this gentleman, who professes to cure insanity, is of opinion her indisposition is seated in the brain."

Pedro darted a scrutinising glance, mingled with contempt, at Polydore, as he hastily approached Victoria, who now raised her beautiful and intelligent eyes with a look of piteous supplication, so expressive of her feelings, that Pedro was affected almost to tears, and, full of compassion, he took her no longer rebellious hand.

"The assertions of that gentleman, my lord, I take upon me flatly to contradict,"

said Pedro, after a short pause. "This indisposition is seated in the heart, not in the head; and my lovely patient will, I have no doubt, soon prove her mental health, by doing all she can to aid my medicines in conquering this agitation. But while I answer for this on my patient's part, I have demands to make upon yours."

"No prosing, Pedro," said Garcias sternly: "you understand me."

"I do," replied Pedro determinately, "and I hope Don Manuel understands me. I have been in his service now some years; have ever strictly done my duty, and will be awed into silence by no man. You, my lord, profess to prize this lady. If her fate really interests you, attend to me. The time is so short since, with the utmost difficulty, I snatched her from the grasp of death; since, with the greatest exertions of that skill you so highly estimate, I had scarcely power to bring her through one of the most dangerous fevers I ever witnessed, brought on solely by the agitation of her mind—(Nay, frown not, signior Garcias, I will speak—Life, you too well know, has lost its charms for me; there-

fore I fear you not—) so short is the space, I say, my lord, since I beheld this young and lovely blossom, blighted by storms she had not strength to contend with, drooping, and all but dead, that I can scarcely credit the evidence of my senses at seeing her, even delicate and weakly as she is. She wants the tenderest care, the genial soil of peace, to save her yet. In short, unless something is done, and that immediately, to relieve this agonising agitation of spirits, to release her from every species of alarm, and restore her mind to at least comparative tranquillity, I will not, cannot, answer for the consequence."

Don Manuel, conte Vicenza, and the young stranger, in visible consternation, demanded of Pedro "what was to be done?"

"Donna Victoria must immediately retire to her own chamber," Pedro replied, "where every precaution must be taken to prevent the occurrence of any circumstance that can possibly awaken apprehension in her mind; and unmolested must she be permitted to continue there until all these alarming symptoms subside. Teresa must be allowed to re-

main constantly with her night and day, and I too shall be near at hand, to administer (if necessary) more medicine than what I shall now hasten to give her, as I much fear I shall be obliged to pass the greater part of this night in the adjoining chamber with Diego, who has been for some time confined to his room by a low fever, which I thought almost well this morning; but this evening he has become so suddenly ill again, that—"

"Diego's chamber adjoining hers!" said Garcias with surprise and surliness—"How dare he remove to the north wing?"

"He has not removed," returned Pedro; "but donna Victoria, whom my lord ordered him to obey, chose to have a chamber proximate to Teresa."

"D—d affectation!—But she shall no longer be indulged in such caprice," muttered Garcias.

"I am shocked, I am grieved, my life," said Don Manuel, addressing Victoria in a voice of insinuating softness, "that you should have chosen so comfortless, nay so wretched, an apartment for yourself. But surely, my love, now that I am here to

guard, to protect you from every ill, you will not think it necessary to continue there. Come, come, my Victoria, I must exert my powers in striving to persuade you into obliging me. Return to your own chamber, my life. Do, sweet angel!—Victoria, will you, will you not oblige me?" And his obedient eyes were now illumined with the almost resistless eloquence of tenderness and persuasion.

Victoria, with looks expressive of the horror this request inspired her with, grasped Pedro by the arm in speechless agony for protection.

"Not to-night at least," said the humane surgeon, "can a compliance with your request, my lord, be thought of. Nothing, I again declare, must be done to agitate my poor patient." Then advancing between Don Manuel and the conte, he spoke in a low voice, but with much earnestness, to the former. Victoria was now all ear, since her fate seemed depending upon the result of this conference, and yet she could only catch a few unconnected words of Pedro's.

"So ill as she has lately——I must have my way——Further apprehensions——Live this night through——Quiet alone can save——"

"On your life, Pedro, is this your real opinion?" said Don Manuel.

"On my soul it is, my lord."

Don Manuel approached the lovely trembling sufferer. "For to-night then, my love," said he, "I will cease to urge my request, and will not oppose your little caprice about your chamber. But for this indulgence, my lovely, my beloved Victoria must remember I shall expect some concessions on her part at a future period."

Victoria would have thanked him for this small favour granted to her distress, had not the impassioned tenderness of his voice and manner, by heightening her alarm and agitation, kept her still silent.

Teresa, who had been summoned to attend our heroine to her chamber, now entered; when the conscious pride of superior worth inspiriting all her faculties, Victoria arose without aid, took Teresa's arm, and, with all the dignity her own virtues, and the

contempt she felt for him who had plunged her into such a gulf of misery, animated her soul with, bowing to Don Manuel and the young stranger, without deigning to notice the rest of the party, she left the room, accompanied to the door of it by Don Manuel; who tenderly bade her adieu, and in a low cautious whisper solemnly assured her, that nothing should occur during the night to cause her an alarm, or further to disturb that tranquillity he anxiously wished to behold firmly re-established.

Now, preceded by Pedro, Victoria hastened to her chamber; and not until she entered it did she perceive Hero was of the party, before whom, as she had too much reason to know her infidelity, she feared to express her gratitude to Pedro, or to implore his future protection; and perplexed and alarmed at finding this treacherous woman was to be her companion once more, she sunk pale and trembling into a seat, and burst into tears.

Pedro took a chair beside her, and, whilst he looked as if he wished to comfort her, he desired Teresa to go and order thither, every thing that could be wanting for their fair

patient's accommodation. "Be speedy," said he; "for I cannot leave her until your return, and I wish her soon to take the medicines I have yet to prepare for her."

Teresa instantly departed; and Pedro, wishing to speak a few words to Victoria that might be incomprehensible to Hero, sat for some moments ruminating upon what method to pursue for that purpose. The Spanish, French, and Italian languages were understood by her; nor could he therefore have any hope, if Victoria was mistress of Latin, it would conceal what he wished to say from being in some degree intelligible to Hero; when, in the midst of this his perplexity, Victoria addressed him in a calm but plaintive voice—

"You are very compassionate, signior; and I think you will not refuse to give me the comfort of knowing, if there is a chance, a hope, of my being soon released by death from misery."

"That you soon will be released from your afflictions I have little doubt; but not by death, I trust."

"Ah! signior, I feel as if I could not long sustain such complicated miseries."

"Then you may rest assured, donna, that you will not long have them to sustain. The ways of Providence are inscrutable; but this much has ever met the Christian's eye. It afflicts us for our good, and never decrees a burden for us that we have not power to bear."

"Ah! signior Pedro, you were not formed for an inhabitant of this castle. How came you here?"

"I shall answer by asking you the same question. But in being here I have been fortunate enough sometimes to mitigate, and sometimes to remove, the sufferings of my fellow-creatures."

"Oh yes, signior, my gratitude forcibly tells me that, and has engraven on my memory what I am indebted to your humanity and skill."

"The little skill which I can boast of I have derived from experience. For many years I visited various climes as an army surgeon, and from the English of my own

profession, with whom I ever loved to associate, I learned much."

"From English surgeons? Then probably you understand their language?" Victoria eagerly exclaimed.

"I do perfectly. Do you?"

"I understand it tolerably, but cannot speak it fluently."

"You may then possibly like to hear how an English surgeon would prescribe for a patient in your case," said Pedro significantly; and immediately he asked in English, Did her attendant understand that language?

"Certainly not."

"Beware of her: and in no point whatever place the smallest confidence in her; for jealousy has awakened the most direful animosity in her mind. Alonzo, to effect his influence over her, to gain her aid to his project, taught her to believe she had subdued his heart; but since the failure of his presumptuous enterprise, he has taken no pains to delude her further; and she has discovered that he aspired to you, on whom the rage of her disappointment now turns; and venge-

ance brooding in her heart, she will gladly undertake any part that may assist her malice. Therefore be circumspect before her; affect still to fear; although I am commissioned by Francisco (who is deeply interested in your fate) to assure you that he will himself secure your safety. But hold! I must no longer speak in a language unknown to that viper. Narrowly she observes us with a suspicious eye;"—then with a careless air, changing his language to Spanish, he continued, "Thus you see, donna, how different would be their mode of prescription to ours."

Hero, who had sat all this time in gloomy irascibility, with folded arms, and eyes beaming with malice intently fixed upon them, now smiled horribly with sarcastic incredulity. At this moment Teresa returned, attended by Juan, loaded with billets of wood, and every thing the provident Teresa thought might be wanting through the night. Pedro now departed to make up the medicines for our heroine; and Teresa, after carefully fastening the door when he and Juan retired, busily set about preparing every thing for her own and fair patient's accommodation; but

not without many sarcasms levelled at Hero for neglect of duty. But all her eloquent severity was thrown away: unmindful of it, and unmoved by it, Hero sat with a countenance of sullen malignity, until Pedro returned with a medicine, which he desired our heroine to take the moment she was in bed, where he wished her to go as soon as possible.

"If the medicine contains any thing soporific," said Victoria, "I cannot take it; as I would not for worlds deprive myself of the power of watching."

"There is only a sufficient quantity of opium in it to compose your spirits, but not for forcing sleep: besides Teresa, whom you know to be an excellent nurse, will sit up to watch by you; and I shall be in the next chamber with Diego, who has altered much for the worse within these few hours; and, ill as he is, it has been with the utmost difficulty I have been able to prevent his attempting to rise to perform his domestic duties as usual."

Victoria, well divining the source of Diego's increased indisposition, was sensibly grieved; but, fearing Hero, kept a profound silence

upon the subject, and agreed to take the recommended medicine.

"And you, Hero," said Pedro, "must hasten also to bed the moment I leave the room."

"I shall go to bed when I please, and not until then," replied Hero insolently.

"Go instantly to bed," said Pedro: "my patient shall not be disturbed by you; and if you go not into the one before you without delay, Francisco shall pay you another visit, and order you to one you may not perhaps find so comfortable."

Upon mention of Francisco, Hero became pale as death, and, instantly dropping from pride's high pinnacle, and completely humbled, prepared to obey the surgeon's peremptory command; and after giving Teresa some further orders, and bidding Victoria a good repose, Pedro departed; when our heroine retired to bed, and Teresa placed herself in the most advantageous situation for watching her interesting charge—who would have conversed with her, but found herself prevented by overpowering drowsiness. She attempted to ask a few questions, but became every mo-

ment more and more inarticulate. She strove to rouse herself, but in vain. Pedro had deceived her; for, thinking rest absolutely necessary for her, he had administered a much more potent soporific than she was aware of; and ere many minutes more elapsed she sunk into a profound and tranquil slumber, which did not terminate until after nine o'clock the succeeding morning.

CHAP. X.

VICTORIA, upon awaking, found herself alone in her chamber. Instantly she arose, and speedily performed the task of dressing. Her distress had not lost its poignancy; but, from the medicine she had taken procuring for her such a long and tranquil rest, her spirits were more composed than on the preceding night. But long they were not allowed to continue so; for, scarcely had she completed her morning duties to her Creator, when Hero, with much malicious exultation pourtrayed in every line of her countenance, entered the room.

"I am come," said she curtseying with mock reverence, "I am come with Don Manuel de Bascara's most profound respects to the lady Victoria di Modena, the honour of whose presence below he humbly entreats; that, whilst signior Garcias and the other cavaliers are at breakfast, he may have the

transport of feasting his delighted eyes upon the transcendent beauties of the adored mistress of his soul."

The wounded delicacy and pride of Victoria's pure and noble soul, felt too indignant for articulation, and yet too powerful for concealment, emanated like angry lightning from her beautifully expressive eyes

For a moment Hero shrunk into her own natural insignificance, and with something approaching to respect she spoke again—"Will not lady Victoria comply with Don Manuel's request?"

"Not any request sent from him to me by her," calmly but determinately Victoria replied, "who, forgetful of every feeling of delicacy, respect, and humanity, exultingly and wantonly insults the wretched and forlorn."

"Not so very forlorn," said Hero with a horrid smile of malignant triumph. "Lady Victoria has friends and champions enough in the dungeons of this castle; and if her ladyship will not comply with any request sent by me, Don Manuel, to evince his re-

spect and please her delicacy, must himself come hither to make his wishes known."

"Oh, Hero!" exclaimed Victoria in tremulous tones of the most touching distress and supplication, "if one feeling yet remains of that humanity which once actuated your mind, threaten me not with such horrors; and do not you accumulate my misery because fate has thrown me into your power: compassionate my sufferings—respect my distress—forget not the best ornaments of the female mind, and I will unhesitatingly attend to your request, and accompany you wheresoever Don Manuel commands me to go." She moved towards the door; when suddenly recollecting Pedro's suspicions of Hero, she stopped, she hesitated: at length she continued—"Might I not be permitted to see Pedro or Teresa before I leave my chamber? I feel as if I much required the assistance of signior Pedro to compose my spirits, before I attempt to encounter the horrors of the day. Can I, think you, be allowed this small favour?"

"Certainly," replied Hero with a malign sneer, "most certainly: lady Victoria will

be allowed to see them, though not exactly where she wishes. But she who is all humanity and gratitude to her friends, will think it not too great a condescension to visit them in a dungeon."

Victoria's heart bounded painfully with the fell shock of horrid surprise and anticipating apprehension.

"In a dungeon!" she exclaimed, almost convulsed with grief and terror. "Explain—tell me. It is Pedro or Teresa I wish to see; where, where are they?"

"In the dungeons, with the rest of lady Victoria's wise champions; where, as signior Garcias has just said, she may find them fast bound in the chains of her friendship, and where signior Pedro may find some of his *English information necessary* for composing the spirits of himself and fellow prisoners, to enable *them* to go through the horrors of this day."

This was a heavy blow, benumbing to all Victoria's faculties. Her feet alone seemed equal to their function. Unknowing what she did, and yet seeming to wish for an escape from the unfeeling Hero, she fled out

of her chamber, and involuntarily stopped at Diego's, as if to seek comfort or refuge there. The door of it was open: eagerly she cast her eyes around the chamber in pursuit of succour, when the bed first awakened and riveted her most animated attention. It was not only untenanted, but all the bedding gone and the room totally deserted. She uttered a piercing shriek, and wildly articulated—"Diego! Where, where is Diego?"

"In another world," unfeelingly replied Hero, who had closely followed her.

"Dead! Diego dead!" Victoria screamed in agonising grief and terror.

"But why does the devout, the pious lady Victoria express so much surprise and consternation at the decrees of Heaven?—Sooner or later we all must die, as the sanctified Alberti has often preached to her."

Victoria's portion of misery seemed now completed, and she leaned against the door-case of Diego's vacant chamber, in silent, motionless despair.

"Come, come, Don Manuel will become impatient at being so long deprived of a sight of his charmer," said Hero taking Victoria'

hand; which she no sooner touched than that lovely persecuted being, shrinking from her grasp as she would from contamination's contact, hastily snatched her hand away, and, springing into action, precipitately and wildly darted down the staircase—and, to the astonishment of Don Manuel and his companions, glided through the parlour into the library, and stationed herself at the door of Sebastian's apartment, where she vehemently knocked, and, in the sharp tones of reason chasing despair, fervently invoked "her venerable friend's protection." Don Manuel, concerned and amazed, followed her; and as he drew nearer to her, she, trembling with dismay, clung almost convulsed to the door-case.

"What! what means this distressing agitation, loveliest of beings?" said he in a soft insinuating voice: and he would have taken her hand, had not she, with all the cunning of approaching insanity, eluded his grasp and fled from him into the hall, where the ruthless Garcias soon overtook and caught the trembling fugitive.

"So," cried the wretch sternly, as he seized her in his arms, "you thought to be

refractory, did you? But we have ways and means to exact obedience; and you shall learn to tremble at coercion, at the strait waistcoat, and other devices to bend your stubborn spirit."

The shock which the voice and grasp of Garcias inflicted, at once recalled Victoria's wandering reason, and tears of anguish burst from her eyes, and convulsive sobs almost rent her agitated breast. In vain she struggled to get free, and supplicated for pity. Inexorably he bore her to the door of Gonzalvo's apartment, where he rung the dismal-sounding bell; and our hapless heroine felt something approaching to a gleam of comfort, in the idea of being near Hippolyto and her other friends, although in a dungeon.—Gonzalvo appeared.

"Lead to that cell," said the savage Garcias, "where we tortured our last refractory maniac to death."

Gonzalvo preceded them to the dungeons; and opening one of the first they came to, Garcias bore his wretched victim into it, and placed her upon a truss of straw in one corner of the dreary cell.

Victoria had now no comfort left but in her reliance upon Heaven. She raised her hands and eyes, and devoutly, though silently, implored protection and fortitude from above. For a few moments Garcias observed her with ludicrous solemnity, and then, with a sneering laugh, entreated her not to keep so churlishly to herself all the good things she was saying—"Pray aloud for my edification," cried the profligate, "and I'll say Amen most piously.—Go on, go on, I beg you; for see the utility of praying. Your prison-doors are opening most evangelically, and a pretty little cherub coming in haste to fly away with you from the wicked."

"Wretch!" exclaimed Victoria, starting from her bed of straw, her indignation at the profane insult offered to her Creator by this impious ribaldry giving renovated strength to her bodily as well as intellectual powers. "Wretch! leave me, instantly leave me, nor longer shock my ears by your daring blasphemy: and know, I had infinitely rather be the forlorn, insulted prisoner, brought by your cruelty hither for the inhuman joy of further torturing, than still to possess the

blessing liberty with a heart like yours. Should it be the will of Heaven, my prison doors will be opened in despite of you and your iniquitous associates. You have no dominion over me, but what is lent you by Providence for some wise purpose; and although the eyes of our Creator may have been long averted in horror from this castle, because you inhabit it, they will now turn, depend upon it, in pitying kindness at the supplicating voice of persecuted innocence."

"Te, ti, te, to!—te, ti, te, tum!—a most alluringly lovely preacher, by San Jago! so alluring, that by Heaven I must kiss away those seductive little cupids that wanton in the ruby portals whence these divine tenets issue, ere one word of conviction can find its way into my apostate ears."

Indignant purity darted its fire upon the libertine through the eyes of Victoria. His insolent threat was repelled by a single glance. He dared not to advance: but with an affected laugh to hide his mortification, he said with a malicious sneer, that as they were not likely to convert each other, he would retire and send the renowned dottore Impazzato Delirio

to try his skill; and then, with a diabolical look of triumph at the misery and terror he had awakened, the barbarian departed; and before Victoria had time to recover in any degree from the horror his depravity and insolence had inspired, she heard the bars of her prison undraw, and conte Vicenza entered alone.

"Well, my lord!" exclaimed she with that determined composure, not the calm of apathy, but the firmness of a soul rising superior to the miseries which encompassed her—"Well, my lord! am I honoured with this visit for the purpose of your adding new insults to those I have already received from your? Or do you only come to view the splendour and convenience of that apartment your kindness in expelling me from the protection of my aunt has forced me into?"

"Cruel and ungrateful Victoria!" replied the conte, apparently much surprised and disconcerted at the firm intrepidity of this address, "is this my reception, after all the dangers and difficulties I have encountered and am involved in for your preservation? Unwearied were the pains, and innumerable

were the toils, which I endured in tracing you hither. With a hope of releasing you from your horrid captivity, I, with a chosen few, adopted the daring and hazardous attempt of entering the forest which proved so fatal to you; and we have ventured our lives, our liberties, our happiness, and voluntarily surrendered ourselves to the dæmons of iniquity, to be brought in chains to this their infernal dwelling, for the sole purpose of liberating my Victoria, or to perish in the glorious attempt."

"I have had such proofs," returned our heroine with undaunted firmness, "of conte Vicenza's intentions relative to the promotion and preservation of my happiness, that full well I know how to estimate those perilous achievements wilfully encountered for my advantage. But, my lord, if you have sufficient regard for me thus to hazard so much for my preservation, why did you seek my destruction by attempting to blast that purity which could alone constitute my tranquillity here and happiness hereafter? Oh! conte Vicenza, when you banished me from my aunt, my guardian, my natural protectors, you should have sentenced me to some

Lethean clime, to learn forgetfulness of what is past, before you could hope to obtain my favourable opinion. Youth is, I know, the season for credulity; but sad experience has given me knowledge which my years denied me. Once I believed you so very amiable, that I loved you as my parent, and hard I thought would have been the task of making me alter my ideas of you. But when the black page of deliberate villany was opened by yourself to my astonished view, when I there saw the destruction of the innocent unsuspecting orphan whom your own roof sheltered—the niece of your wife, committed to your care by a man whom you had ever called your friend—plainly and mercilessly marked out in unequivocal characters by you—I was painfully convinced that the tablet of your heart contained not one spotless page whereon virtue or honour could trace an impression. The bond of confidence was by yourself destroyed; and other proofs than your own assertions (and incontestable ones they must be) of your penitence must I have, before I can behold you without contempt and horror."

Conte Vicenza, trembling and pale with rage and shame, vehemently articulated—"Unthankful infatuated girl! drive me not on to your destruction. Hither I came to save, to deliver you; but you disdain my kindness, are ungrateful for the perils I have run. Insult, scorn, deride me; but reflect, reflect before it is too late:—provoke not your own eternal misery and ruin. You know not what I have in my power."

"You have me, alas!" replied Victoria; "and too well have you taught me to fear you. But although fully aware of the helplessness of my forlorn situation, my heart will not submit to the debasement of veiling in dissembled courtesy the indignation my insulted purity has awakened. And do you, conte Vicenza, in your turn reflect, that not a sparrow falls unnumbered by Him who formed it; and shall the destruction of an unoffending human being be passed unheeded by? No, no, believe me. Then deliberate, reflect, before you draw divine vengeance upon you; for rest well assured, the destroyer of innocence and helplessness will some time meet the dreadful day of retribution."

There was something so awfully impressive in the solemn but fascinating melody of Victoria's accents, in her interesting youthful innocence and beauty, while something like celestial fire animated her countenance, and illumined with rays scarcely mortal her ever expressive eyes, that Polydore felt for a moment the power of virtue, when he saw her "in her own shape how lovely!" But the influence proved only momentary.

"Well then," said he sullenly, "you despise my protection and succour, Victoria. You blindly urge your fate, and wilfully impel me on to abandon you to the mercy of the infernal wretches into whose hands your ruthless destiny has thrown you; miscreants who subsist on plunder, whose sanguinary souls delight in murder, and every crime disgraceful to humanity."

"Well, my lord, I have no cause to fear death, although I have to place my confidence in you."

"No, no, Victoria, do not believe death is the fate that here awaits you. No, no, no; a nobler doom will be yours.—Don

Manuel—the just, the good, humane Don Manuel, captivated by your heavenly beauty, means to make you his on terms which may not prove quite so congenial to your fastidious feelings."

Victoria, shrinking with horror and the rankling pain of wounded delicacy, found it difficult still to preserve her firmness; but, after a pause, she calmly answered—

"Such, too, was the design of the just, the good, humane conte di Vicenza; and as he has preceded Don Manuel in meditating my destruction, so does he precede him in my abhorrence: and know, my lord, let my fate in Don Manuel's castle be as dreadful as vice can plan, and cruelty perform, I prefer it, infinitely prefer it, to the dangers of your protection."

"Fiends and furies!" exclaimed the conte in a paroxysm of rage and disappointment—"So then, so then, infatuated girl, it is your own choice to become the mistress of the miscreant Manuel!"

"Choice, conte Vicenza," she indignantly replied, "has been by you long banished from my society; and the unoffending daugh-

ter of the benefactor of your youth is by your means become a poor pliant machine, only to be actuated by the caprice of others."

"Will you hear what I have to say, or not?" cried the conte, vehemently grasping her struggling hand.

"Even in that you see, my lord, choice is denied to me. If here you speak I must hear you: I have no place of retreat. This dungeon is not very spacious, and I am a prisoner in it."

And now our persecuted heroine could scarcely command her feelings sufficiently to listen; while conte Vicenza again profaned her ears by a repetition of his debasing passion for her, glossed over with all the insidious sophistry his artful soul suggested.

"In a fatal moment," said he, "my ardent but ill-fated passion lulled propriety, and vanquished my struggling honour; and I had the unjustifiable temerity to shock your spotless purity by an avowal that has ever since overwhelmed me with shame and remorse. In the moment of resentment you complained to the duchessa; who, although she beheld

me the most contrite of penitents, affected still an alarm for your safety, and confined you to your own apartments. She was alarmed, but not by me, nor for your peace, Victoria. It was for herself she trembled.

"Be not too much shocked, my amiable, my spotless Victoria, at the depravity I am compelled, alas! to disclose of her you have been taught to estimate and reverence. Grieved am I to say, the duchessa is not that unexceptionable being she has appeared to your unsuspecting innocence; and her licentiousness has weaned my once ardent affection from her. Long did I behold even her faults through the veil of partiality; but at length your bright excellence appeared in contrast, and dissolved the charm. Partiality no longer deluded my senses; the mask dropped, I clearly saw, and despised.

"The comte de Montfort has been long the darling object of this abandoned woman's affections; but he was deaf to the syren while your superior attractions were in view. You therefore were confined; the pretence, my conduct. But the comte was importunate in his solicitations, for being allowed to see you;

and irritated by her inflexibility, he threatened to carry you off by stratagem. The jealousy that this threat awakened caused her sudden resolution of sending you into Spain—a project which she too fatally executed unknown to me. But how can I pourtray my phrensy and despair, when the cruel step she had taken was revealed to me! Almost frantic, I flew in pursuit of you; but vain my eager researches, until the only survivor of those who attended you in your fatal journey appeared before me, and related your calamitous fate. Wild with my dreadful apprehensions, I boldly formed a project for your rescue. I selected a chosen few to accompany me; and whilst I was engaged in preparations for my glorious enterprise, the weak de Montfort was caught in the duchessa's toils; and such proof was given to me of the culpability of her conduct, as to inspire a dear, a rapturous idea that I have fondly cherished.

"The duchessa's cruelty to you added hatred to my former disgust; and I rejoiced at her infamy in the flattering hope of honourably obtaining my adored Victoria.—

Immediately, therefore, I had this contract drawn out," and here the conte produced a parchment, "which if you will now sign, promising to become my wife as soon as the tardy law will allow it, I will take you from this place of horrors, and convey you without delay to the convent where your Ursuline resides. I then will open the process for obtaining a divorce from the duchessa; and the moment that is gained, our union, my Victoria, shall take place."

Victoria was inexpressibly agitated while Polydore was speaking; and although she felt additional horror and contempt for the depraved and ungrateful wretch who could rejoice at the infamy of a wife who had raised him from indigence to affluence, she forbore to express her feelings, and only said, while she viewed him with the steady eye of observation—

"By what miracle, conte Vicenza, did that attendant who alone escaped the massacre, since he did not accompany me hither, find out the means of directing you to the place of my captivity, so impenetrable as it has for ages been to all intruders?"

The conte hung his head, visibly disconcerted, and remained silent.

"Ah, conte," said Victoria, "you should have displayed a little more ingenuity in the formation of a tale intended for the ear of those not quite devoid of common sense."

"My story," replied Polydore, "is as perfect as truth can make it; and I only hesitated because I was grieved at your suspicions of my probity, compelling me to break a solemn promise. But I must sacrifice all my scruples to obtain credit with you, incredulous as you are to every appearance of virtue in me. The surviving domestic could only guide me to the forest, from whence he saw you and your female attendants borne away. In the forest I could gain no intelligence. I therefore made every possible inquiry in the neighbourhood; and at Bascara Providence threw in my way a disaffected follower of this miscreant Manuel, who for a considerable bribe, and upon a solemn oath of secresy, led me to the place of my Victoria's confinement, planned the scheme for my captivity, and also for your deliverance."

Although Victoria saw much improbability

and inconsistency in the conte's narrative, she was not in sufficient health of mind to enter into any disquisition with him; and, contented in her incredulity, she made no reply. Polydore, construing her silence as propitious to his wishes, now artfully entreated her, with every specious argument his subtile imagination could supply him with, to sign the contract. He soothed, he flattered, implored, threatened—but in vain. Victoria's inflexibility seemed, if possible, each moment to increase; and in all the rage of mortification and disappointment he quitted the dungeon, telling Victoria he would give her twenty-four hours to consider well ere she sealed her own perdition: at the expiration of that interval he would return to know her final determination; when, should it prove inauspicious to his wishes, he would then undeceive Don Manuel relative to her insanity, which he had alleged to gain uninterrupted access to her; and then, abandoned to the power of merciless villany, she would too late repent her ingratitude to him.

When conte Vicenza departed, Gonzalvo secured the door; and Victoria was uninter-

ruptedly left to indulge feelings so miserable, that it was some time before such a trifle as a small crumpled bit of paper upon the ground arrested her attention. Its lying close to the spot where the conte had stood when he drew the contract from his pocket giving it consequence in her estimation, she hastily snatched it up; when she found it to be part of a torn letter, written in a hand totally unknown to her; and her own name meeting her eyes, she eagerly approached nearer to the dim light, and with increasing horror read—

" Scheme portends; such
Lady Victoria is in captiv
No pity for the horrors she
by terror, such as our
inevitably fall into the snare.
chessa's wealth goes from you
Your prodigality and love of dissipa
Your victim has some property; as
the brother, as you say, can easily be assassi
manage with secresy, and say he fell in batt
the surrounding perils of a soldier's life can cover
come in by law for the immense possessions of conte Arios
can send three, who may be depended on as good
not flinch at the sight of blood they spill
remit more money without delay."

The blood chilled in Victoria's veins, and every nerve was convulsed with horror. Tortures should not now force her to become the wife of conte Vicenza; and, consequently, she should be doomed to suffer, in her dreadful captivity, all the cruelties which merciless villany might inflict. The prospect was almost too shocking for human fortitude to look upon; and shrinking at miseries so unmerited, the question of "Why should a life so (I hope) guiltless as mine has been call for such signal instances of divine displeasure as threaten me?" now suddenly thrilled through her mind; and the answer, so replete with conviction of Heaven's beneficence, gleamed with such comfort to her heart, that she fondly cherished the hope of succour it inspired; and, in contemplating the mercy of Providence, she insensibly sunk upon her knees to implore its protection. She soon found the efficacious balm distilled from the influence of piety pouring its aromatics into her lacerated mind. But from this consoling intercourse was she at length disturbed by a sudden noise of chains violently clanking at some distance from her cell, which was im-

mediately succeeded by a dreadful confusion of voices, and clashing of swords; which soon ceased, and left no sound upon the appalled ear but that of doleful cries and groans of anguish torturing to humanity. These too by degrees died away, and all was again silent as the grave.

Our heroine, conceiving the massacre of her friends had taken place, was soon relieved from the most acute agony her mind had ever experienced, by a total suspension of every faculty. Alike insensible of existence, or the woe her heart was full of, she continued for a length of time, until awakened from her death-like stupor by a rough shake from Garcias, who had entered unheard by her, accompanied by Juan. For a moment or two she could form no idea of who he could be, or of her own situation. At length recollection returned with all its horrors; and believing Garcias was come to terminate her existence, she quickly exclaimed—

"I am ready."

"I dare say you are," replied Garcias deridingly: "as you have not broken your

fast to-day, you must be ready for your supper, which Juan has brought you, and I am come to have the happiness of doing the honours of the table."

Juan hastily laid a cloth, and spread some food upon the table. Garcias desired Victoria to eat; but her heart was so full of sorrow, that her appetite was gone, and she could not comply. Garcias now sternly commanded her, and she strove to obey, giving him looks of supplication for mercy so indicative of misery, that no heart but his own could have withstood them.

"Summon Lopez," the savage at length roared out. Juan obeyed; and a man of a surly appearance and terrifying aspect immediately entered, bearing in his hand an instrument of an extraordinary shape, which our poor trembling heroine conjectured was for torture.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in the sweetest tones of plaintive entreaty, "Oh, for mercy, kill me at once, and do not torture me!"

Garcias for some moments beheld with the most savage delight and exultation the terror he inspired her with, and then re-

plied: "Kill you! No no; you are doomed to amuse us a little longer; and instead of killing you, I am humanely intent upon preserving your life by making you take nourishment; and that instrument, which so alarms you, is nothing more than what we use to compel refractory maniacs to take their food with. It will put you to no great torture; it will only break away those beauteous rows of pearl which now adorn those coral lips. Approach, Lopez, and perform your duty."

As Lopez advanced, Victoria shrieking pushed the instrument from her. "I will eat," cried she in tones of terror and anguish, "indeed I will, if you take that horrid implement away."

Garcias ordered Lopez to retire; and now we find it totally impossible for our feeble pen to give an adequate idea of Victoria's sufferings, while she was barbarously compelled to swallow food her appetite recoiled from and her senses sickened at, while her busy fancy presented her with the horrid image of poison in every mouthful. Tears gushed in torrents from her eyes, and a death-cold dew overspread her forehead, as

she thus gratified the savage cruelty of the arch-fiend Garcias, who then poured out a glass of wine for her, which she eagerly drank to prevent herself from fainting. He then filled her another, which she took without opposition; but upon his handing her a third, she earnestly entreated him to excuse her compliance. But the monster was inexorable, and she was compelled to obey; and the moment she did so, Juan cleared the table, and with Garcias departed, leaving Victoria to those miseries they had increased.

Our persecuted heroine, conceiving that poison had been mixed with the food she had been compelled to take, hastened to perform those duties her pious heart suggested, and then threw herself upon her wretched pallet, in dreadful expectation of the tortures the poison might inflict.

Silent as death was all around her. The lamp burnt dimly; and with nothing to disturb her but her thoughts, she, whether from fatigue of mind, or from the unusual quantity of wine she had been forced to drink proving a soporific to her, soon fell into a profound slumber, which lasted several hours.

But at length she started from it in a state of pitiable alarm, her whole frame shaking with excessive tremor, a cold dew overspreading her forehead, and that kind of awful horror hanging about her which often pervades the human faculties on awaking from a frightful dream; while she felt scarcely aware of any cause for her present sensations but her having fancied, as her slumber broke, that she heard a doleful cry of "Murder!" near her.

Time was scarcely allowed her to collect her almost torpid senses, when she distinctly heard, pronounced in a hoarse and hollow voice, issuing from the most distant part of the dungeon, "Prepare for death!"—This was a terrible blow to Victoria's courage, and superstition exerted its trembling influence in full dominion over her. She believed it to be a supernatural warning; and although expecting death, a herald proclaiming it in such an extraordinary way was more than the mental strength of eighteen could sustain.

Appalled with awful terror, and conceiving herself called upon to pay her debt to

nature, she aimed at raising herself upon her knees, to breathe her last words in prayer; and while striving so to do, a noise assailed her ears like light footsteps in the dungeon. Wistfully she looked around her, yet nothing could she distinguish of what she sought. The lamp, almost expended, threw its feeble and expiring rays not two inches from the spot on which it stood. She listened in breathless agony, but all was again silent. Panting with apprehension she strove to recall her fleeting courage, and made another effort to kneel; when at the moment she effected her purpose a figure glided majestically by her, but of what form the want of sufficient light and the excess of her fears allowed her not to ascertain; and as it passed she plainly saw it wave something mournfully, and in that instant the dying lamp suddenly expired, and all was total darkness.—Victoria clasped her hands, and prayed with fervor. The mysterious voice again assailed her ears, more hollow and discordant than before, proceeding from another part of the cell. "Wretched victim!" it said, then paused. Victoria's knees smote each other. Again she heard it,

but in a cadence of woe so soft, so pathetically low, so mournfully tremulous, as if its power of voice was dissolved in pity.—"Expect no mercy."—Again it paused; and then, as if in that short interval the feelings that actuated it had undergone a total revolution, it screamed out discordantly and frantically loud, "Fiends! tortures! blood and murder! murder! murder!" Its articulation was now lost in a convulsive laugh, and Victoria fell upon her face almost deprived of senses.

CHAP. XI.

From this state, so nearly approaching to insensibility, was our heroine recalled by conte Vicenza and Gonzalvo, who entered the dungeon in about an hour after she fell. Pale, trembling, and dismayed, she arose from her pallet; but without power to stand, she sunk upon the only seat her prison afforded. Wistfully she looked around her; but nothing could she see of what had so dreadfully alarmed her. Gonzalvo trimmed, lit the lamp, and departed, leaving Polydore to persecute still further the hapless innocent victim of his villany, and who now beheld him with additional abhorrence; for, beside the depravity of his conduct towards herself, he now stood confessed to her as the premeditating murderer of her beloved brother. Her soul sickened at the presence of this arch fiend; her frame was chilled with horror as she viewed him, who

hastened to demand her final determination. But ere she replied, she mentally addressed a fervent prayer to Heaven, to support her in a firm adherence to those resolutions her sense of rectitude inspired; nor to allow the horrors she had in that dungeon encountered, or those more dreadful which she might be threatened with, to enervate her mind, and terrify her from that path which virtue herself marked out. At length she answered, and spoke with firmness, a determined unequivocal negative to his vile proposition.

Again the conte urged his suit with all the sophistical rhetoric a mind profound in art could supply him with, threatening every calamity to her which he knew her spotless soul would revolt from if she should persist in her present determination. But instead of beguiling her reason, or intimidating her firmness, he had the mortification of each moment perceiving the tones of her mind visibly acquiring new power; and, irrevocable as death, he found her resolution to encounter every horror Don Manuel and his dæmons might torture her

with, rather than yield to a measure replete with danger to her beloved brother.

"You then, Victoria," said the conte in a phrensy of rage, disappointment, and mortification, "you then decidedly reject my honourable protection, and willingly remain here a prey to vice? Little did I imagine depravity had shelter in that bosom; and that you, whom I fondly thought the most spotless child of virtue, would voluntarily await a fate that purity would shrink from."

Victoria darted a look of ineffable scorn upon him—"Whatever fate may await me here," she replied, "I prefer it, infinitely prefer it, to becoming the wife of a man whom every good property of my soul recoils from. Great is the difference made, in the records of heaven's chancery, between voluntary and involuntary actions. Unwillingly was I brought hither; by force am I detained here; and whatever may befall me through the villany of others my Judge will not condemn me for. But was I to sign that contract, knowing, as I do, the dreadful crime it would occasion—yes,

conte Vicenza, knowing it would be the *fiat* for my beloved Alphonso's assassination—my soul would find no mercy. I act from principles which tortures shall not shake."

Her manner was even more decisive than her words. It spoke not the transient enthusiasm of the moment; its language was the calm firmness of a soul resolved; and conte Vicenza, overwhelmed with shame and amazement at the knowledge of his meditated assassination of conte Ariosto being no secret to her, quitted the dungeon in a fermentation of contending passions, with their concomitant miseries, and uttering a thousand threats of vengeance for her obstinacy and ingratitude; when Victoria, believing his departure to be the signal for Garcias to return and renew his savage sport of tormenting her, and feeling that her enfeebled frame could not long sustain such cruelty, calmly and humbly sunk upon her knees with all the fervent piety of a true Christian, without a single murmur at a doom so sad and unmerited; satisfied that death would soon rescue her from every ill: and, as a Christian devoted to die with-

in a given time, she hastened to prepare for the awful and inevitable moment of dissolution; and in about four hours after the conte's departure, had an assassin entered her cell, she would have met the stroke of death undismayed. But not with such heavenly serenitude did she receive Don Manuel, who appeared alone.

With the air and manner of a most ardent and respectful lover he approached the lovely, agitated, persecuted Victoria; to whom he apologised, with all the insinuating blandishments his designing heart and flowery eloquence could supply him with, for the ungentle treatment she had received through the unfortunate supposition of her mental derangement; but that now, from the ingenuous confession of dottore Impazzato, who had just acknowledged his reprehensible mistake, and proclaimed her intellectual health, he was come to implore her pardon, and to conduct her from that wretched abode where ignorance had placed her.

He now offered his hand to lead our heroine, who accepted it with the tacit resig-

nation of hopelessness, but with a tremor so excessive, that it was with difficulty she proceeded from the dungeon to the library, where conte Vicenza, his young companion, Garcias, and Hero, were assembled.

Don Manuel placed his lovely trembling captive upon a sopha, and seated himself beside her; when in the showy flowers of his rhetoric he hastened to declare an ardent and unchangeable passion for her, and his unalterable resolution of making her his immediately, by the most irrevocable ties which the laws of that community he had the honour of belonging to would admit of. Then he informed her, without waiting for her reply, or indeed seeming to think one necessary, that on the table before her lay the contract for their union, which had already been signed by him in the presence of his friends and vassals, before whom she must now affix her signature; and concluded with an artful insinuation of no person, however beloved, daring to dispute or disobey his decrees with impunity.

Victoria, shocked and dismayed beyond expression, scarcely retained the power of

respiration; while Garcias, with savage exultation, pushed the table close to her, on which a parchment and an inkstand lay: and upon a signal from Don Manuel, several of his ruffian soldiery rushed in, some under arms, and some bearing horrible and terrific implements for torture; and in an instant they ranged themselves in awful divisions before the three unoccupied sides of the table—cruelty and death gleaming in their most direful aspect from each grim, dark, and ruthless countenance.

Don Manuel, snatching Victoria's hand, put a pen into it and placed it on the spot where he desired her instantly to sign her name. She panted for breath; her senses in alarm were all forsaking her; and coward fear was about to guide her trembling hand in striving to trace her signature, when a thought, suggested by her expiring reason, of its being the very contract which would bind her to conte Vicenza, recalled at once her fleeting faculties. Precipitately she arose, and, dashing the pen indignantly from her, exclaimed with emphasis—

"Sign my brother's death warrant!—

Never!—Men take your victim, and Heaven receive my soul in innocence!"

"Oh! matchless virtue!" exclaimed Don Manuel; while Garcias, with horrid imprecations, consigned our heroine and her innocence to his own black patron; and, rudely seizing her, affirmed with an oath that he would that instant make her sign the contract. But from this profane wretch's touch her pure spirit recoiled, and she sunk upon the couch she had just arisen from as apparently lifeless as if the ruffian soldiery had performed the task she had reason to believe assigned to them: and several minutes elapsed before she betrayed the smallest symptom of returning respiration, and many more before she opened her languid eyes, when she found herself extended upon the couch, and Don Manuel, with tenderest solicitude, bathing her temples with restoratives; the young stranger applying salts to her nose; while, in an attitude of much anxiety, conte Vicenza was standing bent over the couch, with one hand resting against the wainscot. Don Manuel and the young stranger had scarcely time to inquire

how Victoria found herself, when the conte uttering a cry of horror, his hand fell from its resting-place, his eyes, nostrils, and mouth distended with strong expression of dreadful amazement, while his looks were fixed in earnest gaze of speechless dismay upon the wainscot. Fear's cold tremor pervaded all his faculties; his breast heaved convulsively, and he at length fell to the ground in a swoon; while nothing was seen by any one else present that could at all account for such consternation, and such a serious effect.

The general attention was now of course turned from our heroine to conte Vicenza; and Don Manuel choosing to have him removed to his chamber, he was accordingly conveyed away; when Victoria happily found herself relieved from further persecution for the present. When supper-time arrived, Don Manuel, with much appearance of tender solicitude, supported our heroine to her accustomed seat at the supper-table. Garcias and Hero following, took their usual places. Nothing of Polydore or his young companion was heard of.

or seen, and an almost total silence prevailed. Garcias, gloomy and sullen, evidently betrayed, by the glances of malignant triumph he occasionally directed to Victoria, that he was brooding new mischief. Don Manuel was abstracted, and often apparently lost in painful musing, but by no means inattentive to our poor heroine when out of these frequent reveries. No, indeed; far from it: often during his fits of meditation his eyes were riveted in pensive earnestness upon her; and when he addressed her, his looks and voice were softened to a degree of tenderness that seemed the genuine effusion of the purest feelings of susceptibility.

At length this almost silent meeting was dissolved by Juan, who at the usual hour appeared to conduct Victoria and Hero to their chamber. Juan alone performing this ceremony darted a pang of bitter affliction through the feeling heart of our heroine. Where now, alas! were Teresa, Hippolyto, and Diego? She burst into tears at the horrid retrospection; and with a voice broken by agonising sobs she bade Don Manuel

good night, and with a sorrowful heart and streaming eyes followed Juan to her gloomy chamber. Passing Diego's room, now desolate and uninhabited, added new poignancy to her grief, and in an agony of tears she threw herself into a seat between her own bed and the secret passage to the church.

Juan hastened to trim the lamp, and retired, leaving our poor heroine alone with the woman whom she had been taught to believe meditated the most direful mischief against her, and the determined deadly malice of whose looks added considerably to her apprehensions. She trembled at the idea of enclosing herself with such a bitter foe, and shutting out all assistance should Hero's vengeance lead to her requiring any. But her fears of conte Vicenza and Garcias conquering every other, she with trembling hands, and eyes full of suspicion fixed upon her companion, barricadoed the door, and then returned to her seat close to the secret passage; through which she resolved to retreat, should Hero approach her with hostile intent; and having placed the lamp conve-

niently for taking with her, she justly concluded that Hero, left in total darkness, and unacquainted with the actuating spring, would be unable to pursue her.

Having now arranged the only plan of safety she had in her power to adopt, Victoria glanced her streaming eyes around her gloomy chamber, where every thing which met her view bespoke Teresa's absence. The beds unmade—the ashes littering the hearth since the fire of the last night save one—the collection of culinary utensils still remaining, which poor Teresa's kindness had collected there to prepare nourishment for her—all, all was comfortless: and the desolation of her apartment brought the forlorn misery of her situation more forcibly into her mind; and she sobbed, nay almost groaned, from the anguish of her heart. She was now left friendless, and destitute of every aid. She clasped her hands in an agony of despair, and, starting from her seat, exclaimed, in the most piteous cadence of affliction, "Where, where have I now a hope to rest upon?" Suddenly the whole

expression of her countenance changed; she sunk upon her knees, her hands still raised, and firmly she said—

"In Heaven, upon my God!"

Every idea of fear was now lost in the pure fervor of sincere piety; and for upwards of twenty minutes Victoria lost the recollection of every thing but the omnipotence and mercy of Him whom she was humbly addressing. The potent balm distilled from the beautiful plant Christianity dropped gently into her wounded heart; her pain assuaged, her spirits tranquilised by its sweet influence, she arose from her knees, and found her chamber occupied by herself alone.

Great indeed was the amazement of our heroine. The door still remained fastened upon the inside as she had left it. The trap could not have moved without its sounds, so forcibly impressed upon her recollection, awakening her attention; nor could Hero have passed through the passage to the church without disturbing her, as she knelt in such a direction as totally to prevent the departure or entrance of any one

that way unknown to her. How then could Hero have possibly disappeared? Was it friends, or was it foes who conveyed her away? Her friends must be Hero's enemies; and with them the vindictive creature would not surely have gone without resistance; *that* she must have heard. However, go by what means soever, Victoria beheld her departure as the kindness of Heaven to herself; and, devoid of apprehension from the mysterious event, she shortly after retired to bed; where, although surrounded by horrors of every denomination, she slept until morning; and more serenely sweet was her slumbers than those of the persons who (though still the free agents of their own actions) had the power to injure her; for she had no pang of conscience to disturb her sleep; and, enveloped in the pure faith of true piety, she believed herself secure.

CHAP. XII.

In the morning, when Juan came to conduct Victoria from her chamber, he inquired for Hero; and, on being informed of her mysterious disappearance, he betrayed the most evident amazement; and on preceding our heroine into the parlour (where Don Manuel, Garcias, and conte Vicenza's young companion were assembled), hastened to announce the vanishing of Hero. Although Don Manuel was visibly astonished and discomposed at the intelligence, he made no comment on it, but strove to hide his chagrin and surprise in attention to Victoria; while Garcias, more vehement in temper and less master of dissimulation, betrayed the most violent sensations of astonishment and consternation; while half sentences of mysterious import fell unguardedly from him; and it required all the address of the wary Manuel to awaken him to a sense of his impru-

dence, without further increasing the curiosity or conjectures of the stranger.

They all soon after sat down to breakfast, when Don Manuel's manners to our heroine were as on the preceding evening; while the young stranger looked upon her with increased pity and admiration. Victoria was a silent spectator of this meal. The sight of Garcias, and the sensuous assiduities of Don Manuel, ever renewed those terrors which her reliance upon Providence subdued in their absence; and the recollection of what she had already encountered in that castle, and the dreadful apprehension of what in this day she might be doomed to, made up an olio of misery for her to feed upon, and threw such a sadly interesting expression of the affliction of her mind into her wan and languid, though still lovely countenance, that Don Manuel seemed much affected; and once, after gazing pensively at her for some moments, he turned to Garcias and said something to him, but in so low a tone Victoria could not distinguish one word of it: but not so was the reply of Garcias delivered; for striking his clinch-

ed hand against the table, he emphatically exclaimed—

"D—d pusillanimous nonsense! What! be turned to a milksop by the pitiful sorrow of a whining girl's countenance? For shame, have you not ever found vengeance sweet? Remember"—when, now perceiving Victoria was listening attentively to him, he suddenly ceased, darting a petrifying look of brutal malice at her that made her tremble. Shortly after breakfast being ended, he arose, and sullenly desiring the young man to accompany him, departed through the glass door into the piazza.

Highly and reasonably as Victoria feared and hated Garcias, she saw his departure with the most painful emotions; as it left her totally alone with Don Manuel, who, though she now, from his late conduct towards her, firmly believed pitied her, was yet compelled to take a cruel part against her, and in sad expectation of hearing something torturing to her feelings from him, she some time trembling sat, when at length Don Manuel broke the silent interval by a repetition of his ardent passion for her,

and an information of his fixed resolution of making her his without delay; and as she so highly disapproved, he said, of the long established custom of affiancing adopted in the castle, he should, contrary to the approbation and wishes of his associates, have the marriage ceremony performed by a priest, who was to be admitted for that sacred purpose the succeeding morning at ten o'clock, when he trusted her own good sense and ductile disposition would prevent the necessity of resorting to any violent or disagreeable measures; and that she would graciously, before his friends and vassals, make him the happiest of mankind, by unreluctantly bestowing her hand upon him.

Victoria, subdued by horror and agitation, could not articulate a reply. She could only bow a kind of hopeless acquiescence. Well she knew that if this marriage was determined upon, her struggling against such superior power would prove ineffectual, while her appearance of submission might possibly prevent the adoption of any violence against her during the twenty-four

hours of respite now implied; and during that period she fondly hoped the goodness of Providence would intervene to save her from this dreadful fate which now threatened her.

The acquiescence of Victoria to his proposition, although too evidently a painful assent, so much amazed Don Manuel, that instead of doing what an ardent lover would have done—thank her for her kindness—he, in a tone of much astonishment, exclaimed—

"What can this mean, lady Victoria? You this morning unhesitatingly consent to honour me with your hand, whilst yesterday you preferred death to affixing your signature to our contract. Surely there must be some illusion. You have some subterfuge. Some one has dared to meditate and promise you escape from—"

Victoria now raised her eyes, filled with all the sublimated fire of virtue. "Don Manuel," she firmly said, "I *dare* to act as my principles direct me. My union with you can only lead me to misery, but not to guilt; and if it is the will of Heaven to con-

sign me to a life of wretchedness, I will patiently submit to its harsh dispensations, whilst my cheerless days can be taught fortitude by the firm hope of happiness in a world to come. But was I now to sign that contract, knowing as I do the direful pitiless crime it would be the black mandate for committing, I should become a diabolical principal in the monstrous guilt; and what balm of future bliss could still the rankling wounds of conscience? Tortures, I again affirm, shall not make me guilty; but in your power it is to make me wretched."

At the close of her last sentence Victoria's firmness forsook her, and she burst into tears.

"Heaven forbid," exclaimed Don Manuel, "that I should make such exalted virtue wretched! No, lady Victoria, no; believe me, although it may be in my power, it will never be in my inclination to afflict you;" and with the most benign and conciliating tenderness he took her handkerchief from her hand to wipe her tears himself away. At this moment the sound of near approaching footsteps struck his ears from

the piazza, and he heard the voice of Garcias: he started from Victoria's side; and had her eyes at that moment been turned upon him, she would have seen a marked and instantaneous change of expression diffuse itself over his countenance. The tenderness of sympathy gave way to a smile of rapturous triumph; and, as he met Garcias and his young companion at the door, he joyfully exclaimed—

"The angel smiles propitiously, and I am the most to be envied of mankind."

Garcias advancing, stood before Victoria, and through his heavy and bent brows fixed his penetrating ferocious eyes for some moments in an earnest gaze of doubt, surprise, and scrutiny upon her; and, as he turned away, his face displayed a smile so diabolical, so ghastly, so mysterious, that Victoria could not define it, though it made her shudder.

"Don Manuel," said the wretch with a dæmonian sneer, "I am grieved to tear you from this condescending angel by cruelly reminding you of that terrestrial vulgarism, business; but this is, alas! the moment for

your attending an appointment of the utmost consequence.

Don Manuel now bade adieu to our heroine, and with Garcias was about to leave the room, when the young man who loitered behind, evidently anxious to gain a moment's conversation with Victoria, recurred to his recollection, and suddenly he stopped.

"Conte *Urbino*," said he, "your uncle requires your attendance, so pray lead the way; nor can I submit to your paying your devoirs to this lady, who in some hours hence will be my bride. Go signior, you are too young and too dangerous a rival for me not to fear you."

The young cavalier, overwhelmed with confusion, chagrin, and disappointment, departed with Don Manuel and Garcias, leaving Victoria sick at heart with misery and apprehension.

This young man then, thought our heroine, is conte di Urbino; he who is so universally esteemed for his amiable qualities. He doubtlessly compassionates my distress, and wishes to befriend me. It was

evident that he had something of moment to impart to me, and Don Manuel would not suffer him to speak to me—Don Manuel my destined husband! Oh pitying Heaven, can this be thy decree? Tears of bitterest anguish now burst from her eyes, and for some moments she sobbed convulsively. At length, while painful reflection agonised her mind, her last interview with Don Manuel repassed in retrospection. His manner, when unrestrained by the presence of Garcias, seemed more the effusions of pity than of love; and she now felt fully convinced of what she had during the last day suspected, that he only affected to be her lover, to forward the schemes of conte Vicenza and his vile coadjutor Garcias. She had surmised from many circumstances, even before she had so providentially found that torn part of a letter in the dungeon, that Polydore's following her to Don Manuel's castle had been part of a plan adjusted even before she had been sent from France; and Don Manuel having so openly named conte di Urbino before her, seemed as if he no longer thought it

necessary to affect ignorance of his knowledge of his new guest, whom at first it was evident they wished her to consider as a captive. And now the result of all this retrospection was, a thorough conviction that there was no real intention of uniting her to Don Manuel, but that something perhaps even more dreadful, which this measure was meant to aid in terrifying her into, awaited her on the morrow. She shuddered, she trembled, and at length asked herself, Can I do nothing to prevent the realising these anticipated horrors?

Oh yes! she suddenly thought; she was now alone, and most probably unobserved; this was then, therefore, her only opportunity of striving to obtain even one moment's conference with Sebastian, who was capable of advising her, and would interest Francisco to protect her further. She hastily approached the door of Sebastian's apartment; and as she went, she thought of her friend in the church, with whom her illness had excluded all communication, and about whom she had sustained much painful anxiety; but now firmly be-

lieving that his departure had long since taken place, she cast a wistful look towards the map, accompanied by a deep-heaved sigh and starting tear, which she hastily wiped away as she gently tapped at Sebastian's door. No answer being returned she tapped again, but still no answer.

Vexation at her disappointment inspired our heroine with the temerity to knock louder, when the only answer she received was from babbling echo repeating the sound of her knocks, which vibrated loudly along the vaulted roof of the library. Attentively she listened—all within was silent as the grave. Her painful anxiety to be heard induced her to try her voice, hoping if that reached Sebastian's ears he would recollect it, and in pity appear to her. Sebastian's name she therefore repeated several times, louder and still louder each reiteration, but still to no purpose; when, almost driven to despair by disappointment and terror for the safety of her venerable friend, she suddenly heard her own name distinctly repeated in a gentle and well-known voice. Victoria's heart almost bounded from its

seat with surprise and joy; and timidly but hastily turning her eyes to where they were so unexpectedly summoned, she beheld the chasm leading to the church open, and her but too much admired young friend, whom she had firmly believed far distant, standing within it, who eagerly beckoned her approach, and she hesitated not to comply as speedily as the agitation of her frame would admit of.

"Great and terrible has been the anxiety which I have suffered, lady Victoria, since last we met," said he, tenderly but respectfully taking her trembling hand. "I knew of your illness, of your danger, and, Oh happiness! of your recovery. Again I waited with eager solicitude and impatience here; but you forgot me, and no longer sought to meet a friend who would —but I must not waste the precious fleeting moments in telling you all my friendship would lead me to do for you, since I am happily here to inform you what I can do to serve you."

Victoria, overpowered by joy, hope, surprise, timidity, stood covered with the va-

rying blushes of sensibility, trembling and in tears, unable to articulate a single sentence.

"Compose your fluttered spirits I conjure you, dearest lady Victoria," continued the stranger in the softest tones of gentle kindness, whilst his intelligent countenance displayed the most animated interest in every thing that could affect her. "Let me entreat you to exert your fortitude to hear with firmness that the moment for your liberation draws very near I trust. All will be in readiness this very night for your escape. Be firm, I implore you, in your belief of my integrity; and when the castle clock strikes one, fearlessly venture from your chamber through the secret passage to the church. I will be at the shrine, to receive and conduct you to some other of your friends, who with myself will convey you to any place of refuge you may wish to fly to. I entreat, I conjure you, exert your mental powers until we again meet, since you will, alas! have no other support till then. Temporise with the assassins of your peace by affected submission; and if possible, by an appearance

of composure, lead them into a belief of your having become more compliant than you have hitherto been. This will at least insure you a cessation from persecution during your continuance with them, and probably may prevent the forming of any new plan to interfere with our projected escape. Come then, cheer up dearest lady Victoria; condescend for once to deceive, and, ere morning, I trust you will be in a place of safety. And now, adieu! until the propitious hour of one: no longer dare I indulge myself by staying here; for, was I now to be discovered, fatal would be the blow given to all my schemes, to all my fondest hopes. Farewell! and may Heaven protect and support you, most amiable, most interesting of human beings!"

With a graceful and tenderly respectful bow he precipitately closed the pannel, and Victoria sunk upon the couch beneath it, her mind in a tumult of sensations that almost subdued every faculty. While her young friend had been present, she had lost the power of articulation. Soon after he was gone she recollected fifty things she

wished to say to him. She looked wistfully towards the aperture—it was indeed closed. She doubted if his momentary appearance had not been an illusion of her disturbed imagination. Reflexion convinced her he had been there, and had promised to rescue her from horror and misery that very night.

Her tears now flowed in torrents, unlike those she had long been accustomed to shed; for these were tears of joy, and, as long absent strangers, she gave them free indulgence. At length, becoming more composed, Heaven had her grateful acknowledgments for its promised kindness: and as her perturbation subsided, her reason began to operate; and fearing every thing which might lead to a discovery of her intended escape, she judged it expedient to quit the library, lest her own consciousness of what had just occurred there might by some means awaken suspicion of a something, and lead to observation, and ultimately to detection; therefore, with trembling steps and a palpitating heart, she measured her way to the eastern piazza,

where she seated herself, and was fully occupied by busy thought until dinner time, when Don Manuel himself came out to seek her and conducted her into the parlour, where conte Vicenza, his nephew, and Garcias, were already assembled—Polydore looking very pale, languid, and thoughtful, his nephew dejected beyond measure, and seeming as if he no longer dared to turn his admiring pitying eyes upon Victoria.

The spirits of our heroine were too much agitated to admit of her availing herself of the attentive hospitality of Don Manuel during the repast; but, mindful of the advice her young friend had given her, she strove to appear unembarrassed and serene; but a novice in art, she could not preserve that even degree of tranquillity indicative of a mind at ease. Nature was Victoria's guide, and the feelings she inspired could not be concealed. One moment fear and anxiety, in despite of every effort, sunk her to the lowest degree of sadness; while, in the next, hope elevated her spirits to such a pitch, that the bright emanations of joy, too powerful for disguise, would burst from

her heart in some mirthful sally of playful gaiety which charmed Don Manuel, surprised and displeased conte Vicenza, increased his nephew's dejection, and drew an expression of mysterious triumph into the diabolical countenance of Garcias.

When dinner was ended, conte Vicenza complained of being still so much of an invalid as to feel exhausted and to require rest; he therefore retired to take a siesto, accompanied by his nephew, whom he ordered to watch by him while he slept; and Don Manuel, after many tender speeches and apologies to Victoria, departed upon business, attended by Garcias. Happy in being thus relieved from society so hateful to her, our heroine resolved to avail herself of this unexpected opportunity to go to her chamber, there to make some arrangements for her promised escape. Accordingly, when she reached her chamber, she took from her baggage the parcels she had formerly made up, containing her trinkets, and deposited them in her pockets, lest, in the moment of departure, her spirits, hurried as they doubtless would be, might

occasion her leaving them behind her. A parcel with some changes of linen she concealed in her bed, as being too large to carry about her: and as Victoria carefully looked over every article her baggage contained, that she might not leave any thing portable behind her which she might afterwards regret, a length of time necessarily elapsed before she was ready to return to the parlour; and, just as she was preparing to leave her room, she to her utter dismay, heard a hollow bound against the trap-door, and immediately after an attempt made to force back the bolts. Alarmed beyond measure, she flew to the chamber door, when her flight that way was unexpectedly prevented by the murmuring sound of voices in the lobby. Should she venture or should she not? She trembled with apprehension—she hesitated—she listened attentively, and was no longer in doubt. She distinguished the voice of Garcias, and in an instant darted through the tapestry door, which she carefully closed after her; and without waiting to take breath or consider what she was about,

swiftly glided down the staircase, raised the step with ease, and unannoyed by any impediment, in a few moments found herself in the church, making the best of her way to the passage into the library, which she hoped to enter unobserved, as at that hour she never remembered to have seen any of Don Manuel's people in the library.

On approaching the monument leading to the passage, Victoria looked with trembling caution around her; and on arriving at the short dark arcade communicating with the other aisle, she suddenly stopped to inspect it, from the shelter a cluster of pillars at the corner afforded her, lest in passing the end, which she must do to reach the monument, she might be seen and discovered by some of those people the stranger warned her of. The instant she took her station among the pillars, she distinctly heard the sound of retreating footsteps along the passage. The icy chill of fear thrilled through her heart. Cautiously and apprehensively she glanced her eyes along the arcade, and beheld her young friend walking slowly on, with one

arm supporting a female, of a commanding height and most graceful form, a hand of whom rested familiarly upon his shoulder.

A pang of torture never before felt by our heroine now shot through her throbbing heart—a death-like sickness assailed her—she tottered, and sunk at the foot of the pillars which concealed her, but still directing her eyes in earnest gaze upon her friend and his companion, who at length stopped, apparently in serious conference. Worlds, had she possessed them, would Victoria have given to hear the subject of their conversation, but by listening she would not for worlds obtain that gratification. Chance had conducted her to where these lovers, believing themselves unobserved, were pouring out the secrets of their hearts, and honour and generosity forbade her meanly stealing their secrets from them; and instantly she resolved to effect her retreat into the library, whilst their backs continued to her.

Trembling, Victoria arose to put her design in execution; but the moment she was about to emerge from her hiding place she

perceived they had turned about and were slowly advancing. To escape unobserved by them was now impossible; to discover herself might involve her friend in difficulty or danger, and certainly would overwhelm his companion with confusion: to conceal herself behind the pillars still was therefore her only alternative. The gloom of the place was favourable to her intention, and she gently laid herself down amongst the pillars, scarcely allowing herself to breathe, and in a state of mind the most pitiably humiliating. Conscious of rectitude, yet still she shuddered lest her friend should discover her as he passed. In what a light must she then appear to him—a secret observer!—She sickened at the thought! but she had no longer time for anticipating fears. They approached her—her heart almost bounded from its seat, and her limbs were convulsed with tremor. They ascended the steps, and without any intention of listening, these words struck Victoria's ears as they passed the place of her concealment, although delivered in a low and plaintive accent by the female.

"Think of the anguish that I shall suffer during your absence, still uncertain if you will ever be allowed to rescue me from hence. In the society of this too interesting, too fascinating Victoria, you will learn to forget your poor Matilda, you can know no peace till you return. Ah! what misery, what anxiety, what restless and anticipating fears shall I be doomed to suffer, while you are—Oh! happy Victoria!"——

They were now gone too far for our heroine to hear more; but she had heard sufficient to make her weep. The sound of their retreating footsteps at length no longer reaching her ears, she ventured from ambush, and with a beating melancholy heart ascended the monument and gained an uninterrupted passage into the library, where she seated herself near to the place she had emerged from, too much subdued by agitation to proceed further, or to think of any thing but what she had just heard and seen. She was grieved she scarcely knew why. Her friend had told her of his having a tender attachment, and why should she feel thus mortified and distressed

at beholding the object of it, whom she doubted not was very deserving, since she was the choice of the most amiable of mankind.—"Ah! how amiable! how very very good! His dear Matilda, it appears, is not allowed to share in my escape; and yet his humanity leads him from this beloved object to rescue a helpless fellow-creature from destruction. Oh, bless him! bless him, Heaven!—and Matilda too, for is she not good and generous? for, agonising as this separation is to her, she benevolently suffers him to leave her to save me from endless misery. But she shall not, no she shall not long be left to anguish, to anxiety, and restless anticipating fears, for me; he shall place me in some convent in Roussillon, and immediately return to her, to ease her mind of every apprehension. Oh! why did she call me happy? Surely it is happy, happy Matilda, beloved by such a being. She knows that she is so.—Then how could I awaken uneasiness in her mind? What could induce her to fear me, or to call me too interesting, too fascinating?—Misfortunes may have made me

interesting, but Heaven forbid that I should fascinate him your heart is plighted to. Oh, no, no, no! I am not such a worthless wretch as to form a wish for doing so."

Victoria's head now sunk upon her hand, her elbow resting upon one arm of the couch, and in the deepest train of melancholy reflexions, she continued quite unmindful of the approach of night or of where she was, until Don Manuel, advancing to her from the parlour, disturbed her meditation by informing her she had been sought for throughout the grounds and castle, and that he had experienced the most dreadful alarms for her safety.

"Was I sought for here, Don Manuel?" replied Victoria, endeavouring to conceal, by affected composure, the apprehension she felt lest her flight through the church had been discovered.

"No, believe me," said Don Manuel, tenderly taking her hand to lead her to the parlour; "since this is the last spot in the castle any of my people would wish to enter after the close of day; nor could I expect to find so young a female, not even

lady Victoria, enlightened as I know her matchless mind to be, alone, in the gloomy hour of approaching night, in an apartment where men of dauntless courage in the field dare not keep such vigil."

"There is something inimical then to mental as well as personal courage in this castle," replied Victoria; "for here your people, signior, have been taught to fear the dead, and I have first learned to tremble at the living. It is a sad knowledge I have gained; but Heaven avert the more dreadful one from me of fearing the shadow of a substance I had injured."

Don Manuel flung her hand from him; but ere they had proceeded many paces he took it again with gentleness. "You are an extraordinary creature," said he; "and it is well for the cause I am embarked in that our *tête-à-têtes* have not been suffered to have been more frequent."

They now reached the parlour just as conte Vicenza, his nephew, and Garcias, entered from the piazza in evident consternation. The moment Garcias beheld our heroine, he furiously demanded where she

had been skulking, and why she had given them so much trouble?

"Garcias," said Don Manuel sternly, "your zeal transports you beyond the limits of propriety. When speaking to a brother ruffian, such harsh and insolent terms may perhaps be sometimes necessary; but when addressing a lady, nothing can extenuate the omission of politeness. Lady Victoria, too justly intimidated by your savage manners, and fearing her evil destiny might lead her to encounter you, took refuge amongst the spectres of the library; and I found her sitting undismayed there, even at this hour, where *you* and *other heroes* of our community dare not for a moment remain alone."

Garcias slunk into a seat, silenced into an impenetrable gloom. Conte Vicenza appeared evidently disconcerted at this sarcasm; while Don Manuel, unmindful of their chagrin, took a chair by Victoria, and entered into conversation with her, exerting every power of his mind to entertain her; and had she been in a place of safety, with a heart at ease, and without a knowledge

of the depravity of his life and principles, she must have been highly charmed by his conversation: but although Victoria strove with all her faculties to bestow her whole attention upon what was saying, and to appear unembarrassed and in some degree cheerful, yet, as the night advanced, her spirits, fluctuating between ten thousand hopes and fears, became so tumultuous, that it was with the utmost difficulty she could conceal her agitation, or bear any connected part in conversation.

Supper-time at length arrived; and although this repast was dispatched with unusual expedition, Victoria thought an age had been devoted to it. Conte Vicenza, as each moment passed, became more restless and uneasy, his nephew more dejected, Garcias more observant, Victoria more abstracted, and Don Manuel more insinuating; not one moment did he suffer to pass in silence, eagerly starting new subjects when the old ones seemed nearly exhausted, as if he feared to trust himself with his own thoughts, which seemed every moment

softening into something of painful fond solicitude for the interesting Victoria.

At last the moment so much wished for by our heroine arrived, and Juan entered to conduct her to her chamber. In the most dreadful and obvious trepidation, she arose from her seat and almost inarticulately bade the party a good night. Her heart bounded and beat with the most tumultuous violence; her trembling limbs could scarcely perform their functions; and her colour varied with a rapidity that proclaimed at once the perturbation of her mind. Don Manuel, as usual, led her to the door, but, without his accustomed tender farewell speech, pressed her hand with energy, and precipitately left her in evident emotion, mysterious and powerful; and so alarmed was Victoria by the singularity of his conduct and by the uncertainty of her own fate, that she found herself compelled to request Juan's arm to support her.

CHAP. XIII.

In all that agitation of mind and frame which hopes and fears like hers inspired, Victoria walked along unconscious whither she was going, until she found herself at the foot of the great staircase. Alarmed, she instantly stopped, and hastily demanded where Juan was leading her?

"To your chamber, donna."

"This is not the way to my chamber," said she in faltering accents expressive of her anticipating fears.

"Not to the one you lately slept in," he replied; "but thither you go no more."

Half shrieking she wildly exclaimed, "I must, I will return there!" Then clinging to the balustrade to prevent his forcing her up the staircase, she earnestly and pathetically supplicated to be allowed to pass that one night in the last chamber she had occupied; but Juan was inflexible.

It was his duty, he said, to obey Don Manuel, who had ordered him to conduct her to the chamber she first had in the castle, and there he would take her dead or alive.

Victoria now, in wild affright, fled from him; and winged with despair, hastened back to the parlour to implore Don Manuel to grant her petition; but he was gone, and no one appeared there but Garcias. Struck with dismay, and with all the agony her mind endured depicted upon every line of her countenance, she eagerly demanded where Don Manuel was.

"Why, what can you want with him?" answered Garcias sullenly.

"I want him to pity me; to have the humanity to allow of my returning to the chamber I last night occupied, and to spare me the horrors of that dreadful chamber I first inhabited."

"What!" said the savage, with a sarcastic grin, "What! do you pretend to dread a return to that room?—*you*, who could magnanimously sit in the dusk of evening, and alone too, in the library, where

I dare not remain? Oh abominable affectation!"

"I have no cause," replied Victoria, bursting into a convulsive passion of tears, "I have no cause to fear any supernatural power; but from that room, which I tremble at passing my night in, you are no stranger, signior, to the mysterious manner in which my respected attendant was conveyed away. Oh, where is Don Manuel? in pity let me, oh! let me see him. He is not cruel—he will compassionate my misery; he will, I know, accede to my petition."

"Will he?—then you shall not see him. I am cruel, or at least resolved; and to that very dreaded chamber you this instant go." Victoria, shrieking, strove to elude the ruffian's grasp, but in vain. She sunk upon her knees, and in the the most pathetic terms supplicated for mercy; but the heart of Garcias was invulnerable to the attacks of pity.

"No, no," said he unfeelingly; "these counterfeited fears can avail you nothing, my lovely novice. If your old attendant was mysteriously conveyed away from one cham-

ber, you forget that your young attendant was equally so from the other; so no more of this flimsy nonsense. Besides, you who are so very sanctified, such an exemplary devotee, have no cause for fear, since your piety is an impregnable shield; and the rosy little cherubim and seraphim will certainly, if not quite negligent of their duty, in case of an emergency, fly away with you from the clutches of the profane." Then, regardless of her tears, her groans, her struggles, her supplications, her despair almost arising to phrensy, he bore her to the chamber she so much dreaded; and there leaving her with a lamp, her dismaying fears, and agonising disappointment for her companions, fastened the door after him and departed.

Victoria's feelings were now tortured up to such a pitch of anguish, that her faculties were benumbed by suffering; and she happily for some time became almost insensible of her misery. With eyes fixed, and folded arms, she sat motionless, while deep groans alone indicated her having still some recollection of her wretchedness.

At length the castle clock struck one—to our heroine a dreadful sound. It tolled the knell of her departed hope, and roused at once her almost torpid faculties to acutest feelings. Tears of the bitterest woe burst in torrents from her eyes; and the certainty of her forlorn situation struck her heart with the direst pangs of despair. At length a new agony of horror suddenly assailed her in the terrible apprehension of her intended escape having been discovered, and that her amiable generous friend would become a victim to his humanity. This was the hour appointed for her flight; and this was probably the moment in which the most benevolent of human beings might fall an unsuspecting prey to the diabolical assassins of the castle.

Images of torture, and death, in every dreadful shape, now presented themselves in horrid array to her dismayed imagination, and floated in ghastly forms before her. In this moment a hollow sound of approaching footsteps struck her ears: eagerly she glanced her eyes around the room, in a hopeless search for succour, when a

lengthened, though half-stifled groan, issued from one of the beds. Her eyes rested on the spot from whence it seemed to proceed, and for the first time she perceived the small bed Hero had reposed in was occupied. With difficulty could she repress a shriek; breathless with dreadful expectation, she looked upon the object of her consternation; and conceiving by the head-dress that it was a female who rested there, she hastily advanced to the bed, with a half-formed hope of finding Teresa, when a spectacle so unlooked for, so afflicting, so appalling, struck her dismayed senses, that, uttering a piercing cry of horror, her trembling knees sunk with her to the ground; and, scarcely possessing power to retain her panic-struck faculties, she fixed her eyes in a gaze of dreadful amazement upon the bed, while she strove to breathe forth with energy a prayer for the repose of signora Octavia's soul, whose body lay on that bed, clothed in a shroud and winding-sheet, all stained with the blood the murderer's hand had shed.

It was in this awful moment of terror and

dismay that the chamber door was softly opened, and conte Vicenza, armed with a sword, entered alone. With an air of compassionating tenderness he approached our woe-struck heroine, whom with the gentle words of kindness and encouragement he raised from the ground. The powers of her mind harrowed by despair, horror, and apprehension, Victoria seemed to have lost all recollection of the causes she had to fear and despise the conte; her now imperfect memory represented him to her as the husband of her aunt, the kind and indulgent protector of her innocence and youth, whom Providence had conducted to her aid in the moment of hopelessness. She attempted not to disengage herself from his support; her head rested contentedly upon his shoulder, and after some feeble efforts to speak she softly articulated, "Oh my uncle, save me, rescue me, conduct me to my aunt."

"I will my beloved, my injured child," he tenderly replied: "I came hither for that purpose; be therefore composed, be pacified, be no longer alarmed, my love,

for I will protect you from every danger." He led her to a seat, and then continued:

"By means of that disaffected follower of the miscreant Manuel, who guided my wandering way to find you in this infernal castle, I have just learned that the most diabolical plot the fiends of cruelty ever suggested is preparing to be executed against you this very night. Assisted by the contrivance of this man, and at the peril of my life, I hither came to save you. This man, and Urbino, with a chosen band, are now in waiting to convey us to a secure retreat; from whence, as speedily as our safety will admit of, we shall proceed to my château, where your beloved Farinelli shall be in readiness to receive you; and I will conduct you from this soul-harrowing place the moment your spirits are sufficiently composed to enable you to encounter those difficulties which must necessarily attend our escape."

"I am composed, I am ready, I am equal to encountering every difficulty that can present itself," exclaimed Victoria, wildly starting from her chair and giving her trembling hand to Polydore, who taking

the lamp from the table supported his lovely niece to the chamber-door; but there he suddenly stopped.

"On one condition alone, Victoria, will I save you from the calamitous fate that awaits you even in the next moment," said he solemnly.

Victoria shuddered. "Name it my lord," she faintly articulated. Conte Vicenza led her back to the table, where depositing the light, he drew the contract from his bosom, and took a pen from an inkstand which lay upon the table.

"Affix your name," said he, "to this solemn promise of becoming my wife the moment I obtain permission from the see of Rome for our union."

These words, with a sight of the contract, like an electric shock, roused at once to fullest vigor Victoria's before enfeebled mental powers.

"Never! my lord," she exclaimed firmly: "no, never will I sign it, or become your wife!"

"Then will I leave you, deluded wretched girl, to the horrors of your approaching fate."

"That fate cannot entail guilt upon me; therefore I prefer it, and beg that I may be left to prepare my mind for meeting it." She waved her hand for his departure, and then intrepidly walked to the bed where Octavia's body lay, on which she gazed in silent anguish; and then, sinking upon her knees, devoutly prayed to Heaven for its support through her approaching trial.

The conte beheld her with surprise and mortification; but at length advancing to her, said, "Silly, infatuated Victoria! you know not the tortures which await you."

"The tortures of conscience shall not be amongst them," she firmly replied. "Leave me, my lord, I entreat you. You inform me my time is short; and do not you rob me of those moments for which I have such necessary, such awful employment."

"Well then, be it so," said the conte furiously; "but the moment is at hand when you will rue this rashness, when you will too late repent your injustice to me." He then rushed out of the chamber, and Victoria heard him draw the bolts which

fastened her in with the murdered body of her friend, without once wishing to recall him; and yet it was to her an awful scene. The first time in her life that she had knelt by the bed of death, enclosed with the corse of her murdered friend, who was so mysteriously withdrawn from, so horribly returned to that chamber; and expecting every moment to meet with a fate similar to that Octavia had experienced, her senses sickened, but her soul remained undauntedly firm to its purpose, until another doleful groan assailed her ears.

"Gracious Providence!" Victoria exclaimed, starting from her knees, "can it be possible that she yet lives?" and with all the sanguine energy of hope she grasped one of Octavia's pallid hands, to try her pulse; but instantly she let it drop in horror! Its clay-cold touch extinguished every ray of hope at once; and now, appalled with direful superstition, she almost formed a wish that she had been less precipitate with conte Vicenza; but in one instant that wish was recoiled from with horror.

Bernini was no more; yet twice she heard distinctly a groan of anguish burst from the bed on which her body lay. What could they portend? She listened in breathless expectation to hear them repeated; but all continued silent as the grave, until she heard the bolts of her chamber-door suddenly draw back, when conte Vicenza rushed in almost breathless with agitation.

"The blood-hounds are approaching," exclaimed he, advancing to the spot where Victoria trembling stood: "in a moment more they will be here; and ill as you have used me, I risk my life to save you; for by Heaven you shall not become a prey to your own deluding obstinacy! I will, insulting, suspicious, inexorable girl, in despite of your d——d, d——d prejudices, save you from destruction! This instant shall you sign the contract and accompany me, or I will myself become your assassin, and spare you the horrible fate preparing for you." Then seizing her in his arms, he dragged the struggling shrieking Victoria to the table, to compel her to sign the contract, which she resolutely exclaimed

against doing; when, by the interposition of pitying Heaven, she was rescued from his grasp by strength more powerful than his own.

Victoria, turning to see by whose intervention she was withdrawn from conte Vicenza's power, beheld Hippolyto! Now shrieking with joy she sunk upon her knees and breathed a fervent thanksgiving to Heaven, while the conte, with phrensy strongly marked upon his countenance, rushed frantically with his unsheathed sword upon Hippolyto, exclaiming—

"Villain! miscreant! take my vengeance!"

Hippolyto was also armed, and parried off the furious attacks of Polydore. "I owe conte Vicenza much," he replied; "but this is not a moment for retribution. In lady Victoria's presence I only act upon the defensive, unless compelled to other conduct for her preservation."

Victoria now starting from her knees, flew to the door to call for succour; but there recollection coming to her aid, she was struck with the conviction that to

summon assistance would be for the conte's safety and Hippolyto's destruction: she therefore flew back, intending to place herself between their swords, when Hippolyto disarmed the conte, who, in the blindness of his fury striving to regain his own weapon, rushed impetuously upon the point of Hippolyto's, and received from it a deep wound in his breast; when, execrating fate and his adversary, he fell, and, in his fall overturning the table, extinguished the lamp.

Hippolyto, now mindful only of Victoria's safety, took her in his arms, and carefully steering clear from every annoyance, swiftly conveyed her behind the state bed, where upon pressing his foot against a pannel it instantly receded, when leaping through the chasm with his lovely burden, he alighted upon the summit of a narrow deplorable flight of brick steps. Cautiously he fastened the pannel with several rusty bolts, and then guided by the glimmering of a light proceeding from below, he quickly descended with his lovely charge, who, overpowered by joy, surprise, and apprehension, found herself incapable of uttering one sen-

tence of that gratitude to her gallant deliverer which her heart was full of.

The beaming light now brightening at each step they took over mouldering bricks and heaps of rubbish, Victoria at length beheld a man standing at the foot of this long flight of steps holding the torch by which they benefited, who on first catching a glimpse of them as they descended, rapidly advanced to meet them, and discovered to our astonished heroine the humane Pedro.

Finding another of her friends escaped from what she had believed to be a general massacre, could not but inspire the grateful heart of Victoria with the purest joy, and tears of genuine pleasure burst from her eyes, restoring at once her powers of articulation; and she would have breathed forth some of those acknowledgments her heart was full of, but Hippolyto gently imposed silence as necessary to their safety.

Preceded now by Pedro with the torch, they began a dangerous descent of a long cylindrical staircase, even more out of repair than the flight of brick steps; and it

required the most wary circumspection to reach the bottom in safety, which they at length effected, and entered a narrow winding damp passage of considerable length; and as they reached its termination, Pedro desiring Victoria not to be alarmed at the sight of her friends, they suddenly entered a frightful cavern, where several men were waiting, all armed with carabines, and from whom Hippolyto demanded if all was ready.

Thomas now stepped forward, with heart-felt glee depicted upon his honest weather-beaten countenance, and with genuine simplicity spoke the joy he felt at seeing Victoria in safety, while the other men answered Hyppolyto's question in the affirmative; they therefore now hastened to extinguish all the lights, except what two dark lanterns contained, the feeble rays of which were alone to guide them through the intricate passes of the rocks to the sea-coast. The men now taking up their arms, they all issued from the cavern, some preceding, others following Hippolyto, who led or rather bore our trembling he-

roine along a shelving and dangerous path through some of the most rugged parts of the rocks.

The night was impenetrably dark; but there came a refreshing breeze from the sea, that, with the gentle assiduities of Hippolyto, helped to sustain the almost expiring spirits of Victoria, who feared no danger from the path, so overpowered was she by the apprehension of a pursuit; and every new projection of rock she could indistinctly see, she conjured up into the form of Garcias: and her heart almost bounded from its seat with dismay, when, by a sudden turning in the path, she found herself close to the beating surges of the sea, on which was tossed a boat that a couple of men were in, lying-to upon their oars, whom she instantly conceived to be Garcias and Juan, and she doubted not the sea-coast was encompassed by their creatures: but soon were her wild chimæras put to flight, by Thomas calling in friendly terms to the men to row in to shore, which they instantly did, and Victoria was seated in the boat between Hippolyto and Pedro. The rest of

the men followed; and, arranging themselves in proper order, they swiftly rowed off to a brigantine which lay at a small distance from shore, the side of which was instantly manned from the brigantine's boat, and Victoria carefully conducted to a chair upon the deck; where, looking around her, and perceiving the rapidity and dexterity with which the mariners were preparing to put to sea, she for the first time believed her escape certain; and, subdued by joy and gratitude to Heaven and her deliverers, she burst into a flood of tears, which relieved her full heart, and which Hippolyto and Pedro attempted not to restrain.

CHAP. XIV.

Every thing having been prepared for a precipitate departure, and as all was now conducted with cleverness and activity, the brigantine soon was under weigh. The waning moon now arising, glimmered its pale light just sufficiently to show the receding rocks which enveloped the castle to Victoria, who, wrapped in a watch-coat, sat upon deck with Pedro and Hippolyto, who both endeavoured, by the strongest assurances of their faith and honour, to dispel those apprehensions and agitations she was evidently struggling with.

Of their truth and honour she had no cause to doubt; but, without the society of any other female to inspire her with confidence, she had embarked upon an element hitherto unknown to her, under the protection of men who were almost strangers, who for humanity's sake alone had under-

taken the dangerous enterprise of rescuing her from destruction, who might be very possibly betrayed by their companions, or pursued from the castle: but even if successful, where would they have it in their power to place her secure from the machinations of conte Vicenza? At length Hippolyto terminated this last uncertainty by desiring to know what port of France she wished them to make for, as being nearest to those friends she meant to put herself under the protection of.

"Alas!" she replied, "I have now no friends in France to whose protection I can safely fly; and my brother is unfortunately with his regiment at Cadiz."

Hippolyto instantly asked the pilot if it was possible to steer for Cadiz?

The wind was against them, and in so long a passage the pilot feared they might encounter some of Don Manuel's cruisers.

Victoria sighed, but acquiesced in the propriety of adhering to the original design of making for some port of France; where on landing she resolved instantly to place herself in a convent, to inform her brother

of her forlorn situation, and inquire from signora Farinelli's friends in Tuscany where to find her.

It was now fully determined that they should steer for Toulon, to illude pursuers who would naturally seek them in nearer ports: and this point being finally settled, they made way with tolerable rapidity for several leagues, during which time Victoria had been removed by the vigilant care of Hippolyto to the little cabin, which afforded but few comforts save shelter from the cold breath of night, and where our heroine, to divert her anxious thoughts, requested to know from Pedro and Hippolyto how they had been spared from what she had conceived to be a general massacre? by what means they had escaped from their dungeons, and been guided to her rescue in the moment when hope itself was just forsaking her?

"What you, donna, believed a massacre," said Pedro, "was in fact a circumstance still more cruel. It was the daily sport of Garcias torturing the wretched victims who have fallen under his displeasure. As to ourselves, donna, Francisco opened our dun-

geons, planned the means of your escape, and directed us where to find you."

"May every power that loves the compassionate and brave," exclaimed Victoria, "recompense him, and you, my other generous protectors! you, who after suffering imprisonment, indignity, and cruel severities upon my account, have thus hazarded even life itself to rescue me from destruction. To Francisco, and every one engaged in this benevolent enterprise, heavy is indeed my debt of gratitude; but to you, signior Hippolyto, who have twice ventured——"

"Cease lady Victoria, I conjure you, cease the effusions of your grateful heart, which lead you on to magnify the little service I have been to you," said Hippolyto, eagerly interrupting her. "The time may come when lady Victoria will find she owes me less than she imagines; when it will be discovered to her how interested have been the motives of my conduct: and until that period arrives, the highest recompense I desire is to see her mind at ease, and to behold her in a place of safety."

Victoria could make no reply. There

was a solemn dignified respect in his manner, that awed into silence every suggestion of his being presumptuous; but, for the second time, he perplexed, distressed, and startled her. Covered with blushes she bent her eyes to the ground, and after a thoughtful and timid pause she ventured to relieve her embarrassment by inquiring if they could give her any information relative to Sebastian, Diego, and Teresa?

Of Diego they knew nothing; Pedro had been arrested in his (Diego's) chamber the night of Don Manuel's last return to the castle, and had never heard of Diego since: but Hippolyto informed her that Teresa was safe under Francisco's protection, and Sebastian well, and preparing to set out to Rome upon business of importance.

Victoria was charmed, was delighted, to hear of Sebastian's emancipation from captivity, which this intended expedition seemed unequivocally to imply. Teresa's safety gave her infinite pleasure; but, deeply sighing, she wished she said, that she knew something of Diego's fate, and of——Sud-

denly she ceased, whilst conscious blushes overspread her cheeks.

Hippolyto, attentive only to her, caught alarm from her too apparent confusion, and eagerly asked "Who else was so happy, so honoured by lady Victoria's flattering anxiety for their safety?"

Victoria was dreadfully embarrassed; her confusion and perturbation increased; tears started to her eyes, and several times she essayed to articulate, but without success; until, at length, her ardent wish to learn if possible whether her horrid apprehensions were too fatally just, conquering every obstacle, she faintly said—

"I know not if I do right in mentioning him, even to you: but it is a stranger, a gentleman whom I accidentally met during my captivity, who, taught by humanity to pity my sufferings, promised to effect my escape, even on this very night. His project may have been discovered. I have reason to think it has; and, oh, horror most direful! his life exposed to danger from the sanguinary bravos of the castle." At this shocking idea, Victoria's voice fell to a ca-

dence of woe so piteous, she trembled to such excess, and seemed so subdued by anticipating terror and distress, that Hippolyto, trembling almost as much as she did, attempted to present her with a glass of water; which he could scarcely hold, so great was his agitation, and which he was at last obliged to resign to Pedro, who expressed much astonishment at this anecdote relative to a stranger whom he had never before heard of, and therefore could not lull Victoria's but too evident apprehensions; while Hippolyto, after several struggles to conceal his very visible emotion, hesitatingly stammered out—

"Of that stranger, lady Victoria, I can—" suddenly he ceased, sunk into a chair, and, leaning his elbow upon a table, covered his face with both hands as if to hide the expression of his countenance from observation, sighed heavily, and, after a few moments, starting from his seat, took several turns up and down the little cabin, as if irresolute, or that his bosom laboured with some powerful secret.

Victoria's fears caught such an increase

of alarm from Hippolyto's conduct, that, her feelings breaking through all restraint, she exclaimed, in a tone of piercing anguish—"For the love of the Holy Virgin, speak, Hippolyto! nor thus torture me by fears too terrible to bear." Then inexpressibly shocked at her want of self-command, and still shrinking with her apprehensions, she burst into tears, and striving to apologise for the excess of her anxiety, tremulously articulated—"You certainly, signior Hippolyto, know something dreadful relative to this stranger; and I should be a wretch, unworthy the compassionating friends I have met with, could I bear with insensibility any well-grounded fear of calamity having befallen him who pitied me, and would have served me."

The conflict in Hippolyto's mind seemed by this time over; he approached Victoria in much distress at his conduct having augmented her alarms—"Be convinced, lady Victoria," said he, "that he whom your gratitude and benevolence thus interests you, for, has not fallen into the power of Don Manuel, or any of his people; nor

could the smallest suspicion have been entertained of your intended flight with him. Your chamber was merely changed to further the vile schemes of conte Vicenza. That extraordinary and mysterious being, Francisco, this morning appointed that stranger to be your conductor from Don Manuel's castle; then wishing still to be more ambiguous, in the evening delegated that happiness to me, but under the most solemn restrictions of what I may, and what I must not, communicate to you. But a period is fixed by him for the termination of this mystery; and when the painful interdict is removed, lady Victoria, believe me you will have much to hear; and in the intermediate time be satisfied that all those you have known in Don Manuel's castle, who are honoured by your good wishes, are protected by those whom the iniquitious associates must submit to."

Victoria's mind was tranquillised by this intelligence: and she could not but feel convinced of its being a fortunate circumstance for her peace that this too interesting stranger had not been allowed to be the

companion of her escape.—In this moment a sudden squall of wind arose; at the same instant a crash was heard, and a shock received; and, as if in consequence, a loud uproar upon deck succeeded.

Hippolyto, desiring Pedro to remain with Victoria, hastened aloft to learn the cause of the commotion. He staid away for some minutes, during which the gusts of wind were repeated; and when he returned he entreated our heroine to disband her fears, since all danger was happily over.

"Upon account of the almost dead calm," continued he, "we had crowded too many sails, and a sudden squall arising carried off some of our rigging that was not in a very perfect condition. But our ingenious mariners have repaired the injury, and we are, it seems, in a better state than we were before this accident. However, lady Victoria, I must remind you of the caprice of those elements to which fate has at present consigned you; and should this prove a squally or tempestuous night, as some of our seamen portend, I doubt not, from the fortitude you have upon many late, and, I trust,

more serious occasions evinced, that you will not suffer much from alarm, particularly as the seamen on board are all experienced hands, who assure me that our vessel is fully equal to weathering a much more formidable gale than that we are threatened with."

Victoria promised to exert all her heroism if necessary, and soon this promise was exacted from her. The wind speedily increaased with augmenting violence, and it required all the efforts of every hand on board to save the vessel, which was borne to the leeward, far from the port they wished to make.

Victoria, as she had promised, repressed every appearance of alarm; but during the whole night, through which the tempest continued, she experienced the most kind and soothing attention from the humane Pedro, who chiefly remained with her, as the strength, activity, and cleverness of Hippolyto, though unskilled in maritime knowledge, made him of such essential service to the seamen, that they would scarcely allow him to absent himself one moment from deck to go and see how his lovely

charge bore the horrors of the storm; and to whom, in the presence of Pedro, his manners were marked by the tender solicitude a fond and anxious brother would evince in a similar situation. But the moment he found himself alone with her, his deportment instantly changed to the attentive, respectful distance of an inferior; a delicacy and propriety of conduct that was not lost upon Victoria, who each moment found her gratitude to, and admiration of, Hippolyto fast increasing; and she almost looked up to him with an awful reverence, as a being far superior to the rest of human kind.

At length the tempest subsided as suddenly as it had commenced, and Aurora, when ushering in the morning, struck the before jarring elements motionless with the beautiful serenitude of her aspect, and presented our adventures with the flattering hope of soon reaching some friendly harbour. The port of Toulon was still much nearer than Leghorn, though far they had been driven eastward: yet Hippolyto strongly advised their steering for the latter; since

now, having been so long at sea, they might, in making back for Toulon, fall in with those who now had full time to be sent, and who probably were in quest of them.

This advice was too reasonable for rejection; but the day seemed determinately inauspicious to their making towards the haven of any of their wishes. The Mediterranean sea appeared as one plate of looking-glass, and the whole face of nature was hushed into an awful calm; and notwithstanding the united efforts of the indefatigable mariners, who ardently longed to ride in a safe harbour, they gained little by their tacking, but remained for several hours almost stationary; during which time Victoria left her little cabin, where, after the storm had subsided, she obtained a refreshing and tranquil slumber; and when she revisited the deck, she partook of the best food the brigantine afforded, which was not very choice, as anxious only for escape they bestowed not their thoughts upon refreshments of a superior kind. But they were now out of Don Manuel's castle, and Victoria had appetite to eat some of the

homely food, which she thought delicious when presented to her by Hippolyto, who seemed every moment to possess more and more—from her increasing admiration of his virtues and his manners—the power of making all she met with, if he was near, appear to her in the most pleasing point of view.

As evening approached, a gentle breeze sprung up, propitious to the pilot's wishes, who, being a native of Toulon, secretly wished to make for that port, and therefore now started innumerable objections to their steering for Leghorn, with the wind unfavourable, and the hands on board nearly exhausted from the exertions of the preceding night; and Hippolyto, although apprehensive of the dangers they must be exposed to, was unwillingly compelled to acquiesce.

CHAP. XV.

THE sails again were filled, and fluttered in the wind; the sea and seamen were once more in motion, and the vessel making considerable way. Hippolyto, employed by the mariners, was no longer by Victoria's side to beguile, by his fascinating conversation, the inconveniences of an ill-provided voyage; and beginning to perceive the effect of a thick haze that was coming on, Victoria took the advice of Pedro, and retired to the cabin; whither he accompanied her, and, with a view of amusing her, sketched a slight outline of his own history.

"My father," said he, "was a respectable but unfortunate merchant at Carthagena, where he failed, and shortly after died, leaving my widowed mother with seven small children (myself the eldest), with a pittance so scanty, that she could with difficulty educate and maintain us, and appren-

tice her boys out as fast as we attained a proper age for it. I was placed with an eminent surgeon; and during my apprenticeship I formed an attachment for an amiable and lovely young woman in the neighbourhood, but whom, being poor as myself, I loved in secret, resolving that, unless fortune should smile upon me, I would never strive to inspire her with a mutual flame, since to plunge her into all the difficulties attending wedded poverty would not be to evince a true affection for her.

"By the interest of my father's friends I was appointed surgeon to a Spanish regiment then stationed in the West Indies; and the moment I was out of my time I embarked to join my regiment at Hispaniola. For seven years I continued abroad; during which I visited various climes, and was so successful in my profession, experience affording me knowledge which my years must have else denied me, that, crowned with fame and riches, I returned to my native country at the age of twenty-six, when I had the inexpressible happiness of finding my long-loved Isabella unmarried; who fall-

ing senseless into her mother's arms at unexpectedly beholding me, I flattered myself that I was not disregarded by her. I was not deceived. I proved a successful wooer, we were speedily united, and for one year I was one of the happiest of mankind.

" I had abroad acquired sufficient wealth for my Isabella and myself, without further practice in my profession; but my family wanted assistance. I placed them all in comfort, and continued my profession, from which I derived almost incredible advantages. I just wanted a few weeks of being one year the happy husband of my Isabella, when, returning from a village in the neighbourhood of Carthagena, where I had been to a patient, I, in a wood through which my road lay, discovered a respectable-looking man extended upon the ground apparently lifeless; but, upon examination, found he yet breathed, though his skull was fractured, and his body severely bruised and wounded in many dangerous places. I had him as quickly as possible conveyed to a lodging approximate to my house, and attended him with such unremitting care and success,

that in a few weeks I made a complete cure.

" He appeared to me an intelligent, respectable man, who, although a little rough in his manners, was by no means insensible to my kindness. He informed me that he was a native of Messini, and was master of a merchantman, which traded in the Mediterranean, and had now brought a rich freight to Carthagena; that having gone out to ride, to view the surrounding country, he had lost his way, and, with his mule, had fallen from a high precipice, at the foot of which I found him; and indeed many people at Carthagena knew him as a merchant, who occasionally traded to the port of St. Barbara. When I judged him able to venture out, I had him to dine every day at my house, where he was a witness of my domestic happiness; and when sufficiently recovered to quit Carthagena, he presented some valuable jewels to my Isabella as tokens of gratitude to us both:—but little did I imagine how soon the gem of peace was to be wrested from me in return.

" About this period I was sent for to the

superior of a neighbouring monastery, whose case had been universally pronounced hopeless. He was the idol of all the devotees in that part of Murcia, and I was promised an immense reward if I restored him to health. I had a favourite sister who was addressed by a worthy, although not affluent, young man, a relation of my Isabella's; and I resolved to give my sister a marriage portion that should make her and her lover comfortable in life, if I accomplished the superior's cure. I was so fortunate as to prove successful; I received the reward, and portioned off my sister. On the evening of this union, when all around me was happy, and innocent mirth reigning, a country lad arrived half breathless at my house to implore my immediately going to the relief of his poor father, who was just seized with a paralytic stroke. It was well known that the calls of humanity were those first attended by me. I therefore instantly accompanied the lad into the suburbs of the town, where, he said, his father lived. I entered with him an humble habitation, and was instantly surrounded by ruffians, who

gagged, bound, and placed me in a carriage, which moved rapidly away.

"I will not fatigue you, donna, by relating the dreadful horrors which agonised my mind, since you, alas! can now better conceive than I describe them. From the carriage I was conveyed into a ship, where I was fastened down in the hold, and passed my time miserable as despair could make it. At length we came to an anchor; I was blindfolded, conveyed some length of way in a boat, and afterwards supported by men along a rugged path upon terra firma. In short, from the moment I was taken out of the ship, I was not suffered to behold any thing until the bandage was taken off my eyes in Don Manuel's parlour, where Don Manuel then was, with the wretch whom I had rescued from death. Scarcely need I now tell you, donna, that wretch was Garcias, who presented me to Don Manuel, with these never to be forgotten words:

"This is the skilful surgeon to whom I owe my life; and I am happy in having pro-

cured such a valuable acquisition for you, signior."

"Language can convey no adequate idea of my sensations, or the horrors I endured when the certainty of the calamity of my fate unfolded itself. It is now eight years since I beheld or heard of my Isabella, or my family; during which period of misery I have ever done my duty in my profession, and still looking forward to the goodness of Providence, which I doubted not, in its own time, would permit my escaping from my dreadful captivity You cannot—"

Pedro was here dreadfully interrupted by a shout of alarm from aloft; and immediately after Hippolyto appeared in the cabin with a countenance expressive of horror and dismay, which fortitude in vain struggled to conceal. He spoke a few words in a low voice to Pedro, who, turning pale as death, staggered to the seat the shout had called him from. Hippolyto, now advancing to Victoria, took her hand in trepidation, and with a broken voice and a look of anxiety for her safety—of more than

anxiety, of anguish that shook his very soul—

"Cruel fate, I fear, lady Victoria," said he, "has not yet done persecuting you, and there will, alas! ere long, be new demands upon your unexampled fortitude."

"We are pursued!" cried she in the piercing tone of deep despair: "we are pursued, and my friends will fall victims to their humanity."

"'Tis true," replied Hippolyto, "that a vessel is in chase of us, which, from the thick fog, and having no glasses, we perceived not until too late. It may be an Algerine-corsair; it may prove our persecutors. Be who it will, we shall not tamely surrender; and I must leave you, to go and assist my brave companions in defence of that treasure which a deprivation of my life or liberty shall alone wrest from me."

Words cannot pourtray the situation of Victoria's mind at that moment. In anguish and despair she looked upon Hippolyto; when gratitude painting in her agitated breast her obligations to him in much more glowing colours than her own personal dan-

ger, she suddenly darted by him out of the cabin. But ere she reached the deck, as she intended, Hippolyto overtook her, and, catching her by the hand, demanded, in breathless amazement, whither she was going.

"It is me they seek," cried she in a tone of animated firmness; "I will deliver myself into their hands, to save Hippolyto and my other friends."

"Angelic, generous Victoria!" said he, affected almost to tears, "they seek us all, and you are the last victim they shall find." Then, tenderly clasping her in his arms, he, in despite of her struggles, bore her back to the cabin.

"Take care of, support this angelic being, Pedro," cried he; "and as you value your eternal peace, suffer her not upon deck, where the generosity of her feelings would transport her to precipitate herself into destruction, with the delusive hope of saving us her friends."

Victoria sobbed convulsively as she sunk into a chair. Hippolyto, rapidly advancing to Pedro, continued—"Take care of her,

comfort her, if you love me, Pedro; and should your professional exertions be requisite for any of our brave companions, I doubt not but lady Victoria's humanity will lead her to assist you." Then turning to her, he hastily took her hand, which he pressed to his heart—to his lips.

"Pray for our success," said he, "most pure, most exalted of human beings!" He gazed on her for a moment with looks of agonising tenderness and despair; then, as if fearing to trust himself longer there, he darted out of the cabin; when Pedro, with a countenance of hopeless sorrow, began, with a sad heart and trembling hand, to make horrid preparations to assist the wounded, while Victoria devoutly raised her heart and hands in earnest prayers for deliverance.

The tumult upon deck, which had never ceased since the first alarm, now rapidly increased, and soon all the horrors of a sea-fight commenced. The superiority of valour, with desperation added to it, was manifestly upon one side; whilst upon the other was that of treble numbers of men and guns.

The din and shock of the ordnance became so powerful, that they sunk our heroine upon her knees, where she fervently implored divine succour, until summoned by Pedro to assist him in dressing the wounds of a seamen who was just brought to him. She sickened at the task, but it was assigned her by gratitude and humanity, and she roused every faculty to perform it as she ought.

The wounded man gave hopes of victory. The intrepid valour of Hippolyto, who was fighting like a lion, he said, would insure it. Exultation and fear bounded through Victoria's heart on this intelligence; but the latter soon reigned solely there. To be foremost in fight was to be first in danger; and although she would have been mortified and disappointed had Hippolyto acted otherwise, her heart sickened at what her reason approved, and, pale, faint, and trembling, she could scarcely perform her task. In a moment more another man was borne down, his arm dreadfully shattered by a splinter. This was a horrid demand upon Victoria's humanity; yet, painful

as the effort was, she hesitated not to comply with it.

"This is a shocking wound, my poor friend," said she tremulously, as she was, by the direction of Pedro, washing the arm.

"Ah!" replied the man, "but it does not pain me half so much as the one our brave young champion has received does; but, unmindful of it, on he fights like a hero, although the whole fury of the enemy is levelled at him."

"What! is it Hippolyto you mean? Is Hippolyto wounded?" Victoria in alarm demanded.

"Yes, donna." (The spunge fell from her hand.") "Yes, and they vow to put him to the most torturing kind of death, if he does not instantly deliver you, signora, up to them."

Victoria waited to hear no further, and was upon deck before Pedro was aware of her meditating such a rash design; and through firing, smoke, and all the horrors and confusion of battle, she made her way to Hippolyto, whose left arm was bleeding copiously, and who was surrounded by a

party of ruffians who had just boarded the brigantine, and rushing into the midst of the clashing hangers—

"I am here!" she wildly cried; "I am here! then spare, oh spare Hippolyto, and let me be the only victim to your insatiate cruelty!" Then grasping the hand of a ruffian which held a sword uplifted to fall with mortal vengeance upon Hippolyto, she sunk, overpowered by her feelings and her exertions, in a swoon into the arms of Garcias.

In the first dawn of returning perception our heroine found herself laid in a birth in a much larger and better cabin than that she had lately occupied; and she also perceived that two strange men were busily employed administering restoratives to her; by these circumstances being convinced she was no longer with her friends, her senses fled again for some moments, and on her second recovery she observed Garcias with the other men. On sight of this diabolical being, the keenest sensibility of her desperate fate assailed her, and convulsive sobs and groans broke from her bosom,

which seemed, as they heaved, to rend her bursting heart; while Garcias, with that ferine cruelty he was no stranger to, bantered her upon the failure of her and her wise confederates' scheme for liberty; and jeeringly condoled with her upon the loss she had just sustained in being deprived of her ebony champion.

"Barbarous fiend!" exclaimed Victoria in a voice rendered almost inarticulate by agitation, "Have you then murdered Hippolyto?"

"Not yet," replied the savage. "Safe in custody the hero now is, smarting from innumerable wounds; but the day he is to suffer the punishment due to his enormous crime and temerity we have deferred until our return to the castle, when you will be sufficiently recovered to be a spectator of our ample vengeance."

Victoria, now uttering a deep groan, became again insensible to her wretchedness, which insensibility continued a considerable length of time; and when her senses were once more restored to perception, so complete was her misery, that de-

spair seized upon her tortured heart; and that dreadful kind of torpor it sometimes inspires influenced all her faculties. Wan, languid, and sadly woeful was her lovely countenance; whilst her sunken eyes sometimes wildly wandered, or were intently fixed, unconscious of the object they seemed wistfully to fasten on. Her bosom still heaved keen agonising sighs, but she remained ignorant of every transaction around her. Imperceptible to Victoria was now the evening's close, the lighting a lamp in the cabin, or the departure of Garcias and his two companions, who, believing her perfectly composed, retired to take food and rest after the toils of battle.

END OF VOL. II.

T. Davison, Printer,
White-Friars.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 084210597